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THE U.S.S.R.
—ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE WEST

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by

S.C.G.

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANCZ

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FOREWORD

THIS BOOK IS the work of the small body of Labour Party members who have become known as the "Socialist Clarity Group". It is based on material originally published in their paper *Labour Discussion Notes*, which has achieved a considerable reputation for the accuracy of its reports and the objectivity of its political analyses. The Socialist Clarity Group believes that the British Labour Movement, as the last of the great democratic European Labour movements left intact, has both the power and the responsibility largely to determine the course of future political development both at home and throughout the world. Much clear thinking and a great effort of will are needed if British Labour is to rise to the stature of its tasks. The Socialist Clarity Group seeks to help forward this process through written work which combines independence of thought and judgment with a sense of responsibility to the Movement as a whole.

Labour Discussion Notes can be obtained from the Socialist Clarity Group at 48, Essex Street, Strand, London, W.C. 2, for fourpence, post free.

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INTRODUCTION

THE TWENTY-FOURTH ANNIVERSARY of the Russian October Revolution was celebrated in a beleaguered Moscow. On that day, as on every day since June 22nd 1941 when Hitler launched his attack on the U.S.S.R., our hearts went out to the workers and peasants of Russia who, by their heroic resistance, are defending not only their soil and their fatherland, not only Britain and her allies, but also the historic inheritance of that Revolution.

To most people outside the Soviet Union, the very intensity and quality of her defence came as an utter surprise. Not only in Germany, but in Western Europe and America, too, it was commonly held that, under the impact of the Fascist onslaught, the Soviet Union would quickly break down and the Stalin Régime collapse. It was generally assumed that the strain on the Russian people had been altogether too great during the last two decades, the economic and political crises too many and too violent, the dictatorship too ruthless, and the fear of war too obvious, for the Russian people to be able successfully to withstand so powerful an enemy as Nazi Germany.

This idea has been proved wrong. Indeed, the practical demonstration of its falseness has been so overwhelming that many people have begun totally to revise everything they ever knew and thought about Soviet Russia. Many who had been shouting for war against Russia after her invasion of Finland are now justifying this invasion as an act of supreme political wisdom. Others who, during the Moscow Trials, had come to the conclusion that there was really no difference between Bolshevism and Fascism or—if any—that the Soviet Union was ruled by a much more reactionary and detestable dictatorship than Hitler Germany are now justifying these very trials as the legitimate self-defence of a State against its Fifth Column.

We energetically rejected the idea of war against Russia when it arose after her invasion of Finland¹ just as we have always opposed the superficial attitude which identified Bolshevism and Fascism. Yet, while we always condemned these reactionary ideas and false interpretations, we must not accept the opposite kind of falsification; that type of falsification that is so common with the Communists and

¹ *Vide Labour Discussion Notes* No. 10, April 1940.

their "fellow-travellers" who sacrifice all independent and intelligent judgment to blind faith and idolatry.

Never has it been more necessary than to-day to come to a true understanding of the Soviet Union. This understanding is vital for our common future; vital if our alliance is to outlast the war, as we desire, and become the basis for a firm and permanent co-operation; vital, finally, for the solution of our own socialist task in Britain.

The last quarter of a century of the world's history has cast doubt upon many of the most treasured beliefs of the traditional socialism in which we have grown up. These traditional socialist ideas arose naturally out of the conditions in which modern Labour movements developed. The goals—democracy, equality, plenty for all, peace—were borrowed from the Radicals. The weapons—trade union pressure, backed by the Labour Party in Parliament—were derived from the actual experience of the workers in their efforts to secure a better share of the national income for themselves. It was assumed that the goals that were being aimed at would in the end be attained by inevitable economic development; and that, in consequence, no particular strategy was needed except the pursuit of the day-to-day struggle of the workers by the most vigorous and effective means possible. It was further assumed that the goals could be attained without any serious disturbance of the social and political structure.

Socialism was conceived as a sort of liberal capitalism rearranged so as to avoid its bad aspects, with the workers in the ascendancy instead of the capitalists. This became true in the practice even of the Continental "Marxist" parties. Bernstein's revisionism effected the necessary reconciliation of theory with practice.

In the last few years planned economies have actually arisen which have succeeded to a large extent in removing those results of capitalist anarchy (economic crises, unemployment) which the old socialist movements always attacked and hoped in the end to remove by their methods. But, in these cases the attainment of a planned economy has only been possible by a radical reconstruction of society which has brought, not democracy, not freedom, not increased rights for the workers, but rather their opposites.

Before the war we found—apart from predominantly agricultural countries such as New Zealand and Scandinavia—that *democratic workers' movements existed only in those highly industrialised lands that were farthest from a planned economy*. The war itself has, up to now, not brought any fresh experience.

Here are very serious considerations for the British Labour Movement, and for those who see in this movement the one hope for the future of Britain and of Europe. Is our Labour Movement no more than the product of a passing age, doomed—for all the defensive strength of its organised power—to be hopelessly out-dated and left behind by the

next stage of economic and political development? Or will it be able to adapt itself to the changing world which is already so unlike the world in which the Labour Movement was created?

This adaptation and rejuvenation is a question of life or death for the Labour Movement. And it is an extremely urgent question, for the war has made the tempo of social development even more rapid than it would have been anyhow in the modern world. The Labour Movement must understand the nature of the problems which face it; it must realise the tasks that history now demands of it.

To achieve this we must analyse clearly the major political situations and events of the world to-day in the light of the tasks facing modern Socialism. This is the only way to clarity, and from that to decisive action.

Quite apart from the war and our alliance with the Soviet Union therefore, it is vital to study her development and to understand the lessons to be learned from it. The true significance of the history of the Soviet Union in the last twenty-four years and of the nature of the Soviet Union to-day is one of the most important, but also one of the most difficult, problems for Socialists of all countries.

Why has the Soviet Union developed in certain directions? What is the significance of its particular form of Government? Is Soviet Russia a socialist country? What has been the purpose of her foreign policy? Must every socialist country develop along the same broad lines as the Soviet Union? Is a planned society compatible with democracy?

These are some of the questions asked and answered in this book, which is not a history of the Soviet Union, but a study of the problems which arise from her history. Every one of those problems has been the subject of violent controversies. We do not suggest that ours is the final word on these most difficult questions. If we succeed in adding to their clarification and stimulating further study and thought we shall have succeeded in the main task we set ourselves—neither to justify nor to blame, but to examine and to understand.

PART I

ORIGIN OF THE U.S.S.R.

I

THE BACKGROUND

THE COUNTRY IN which to-day every school and university room is decorated with a bust or picture of Karl Marx raised the banner of the proletarian revolution in circumstances that differed vastly from those foreshadowed by the great theoretician of scientific socialism.

The vision of Marx was that of a highly developed capitalist society which itself produced all the elements of socialism and which had only to rid itself of its fetters, i.e. the historically obsolete institution of private property, in order to emerge as a full-fledged prosperous socialist society, with a permanently rising standard of living for all and the liberation of the masses from economic as well as political bondage.

This obviously has not been the picture of Soviet development. Nor could it have been. For the Soviet State emerged from anything but a highly developed capitalist society.

It is a well-known fact that pre-revolutionary Tsarist Russia was by far the most backward of the great powers. Nevertheless it is necessary to visualise what this backwardness amounted to in concrete terms in order to appreciate the gigantic task which the Russian Revolution set itself.

More than 86% of the population lived in villages. And of these rather more than two-thirds owned less than ten acres of land which they cultivated in the same primitive and unproductive fashion as their forefathers a hundred or more years ago. About seventeen million wooden harrows and ten million archaic ploughs were the only technical equipment of seventeen million farms. Practically all the peasants were illiterate.

The industrial workers formed a small minority of the population. Scarcely three million workers were engaged in industry, mining,

and transport. Like the peasants and agricultural labourers on the big estates of the aristocratic landowners, this working class smarted under the tyranny of the semi-feudal rule of Tsarism, which paid them starvation wages and denied them the right to combine and all other means by which they might have expressed their will and fought for their rights and better living and working conditions.

However—in contrast to the *modern* system of mass slavery which calls itself Fascism or National Socialism—Tsarism, supported by a thoroughly corrupt bureaucracy and lazy, pleasure-loving aristocrats, never developed any degree of efficiency; nor did it succeed (or even try) to win the masses of the people by propaganda or other organised effort for some, however perverted, ideals—as German Fascism has managed to some extent to do.

As far as industrial capitalism penetrated Tsarist Russia at all, it came, however, in its most modern form. Imported from abroad towards the end of the last century, it started on the level which the highly developed Western European and American industrialism had reached by that time, opening giant plants with modern machinery and the most modern methods of production.

Even before the Revolution, therefore, Russia had never undergone that slow and gradual process of industrialisation from the first Spinning Jenny to the most modern and complicated machine tools which has been characteristic of the West, where it took well over a century. Instead, Russia—or, to be more precise: a small section of Russia—jumped suddenly from the most primitive agriculture and mere commerce into the most modern form of industrialism, a development which, after the Revolution, was to be repeated on a gigantic scale for the *whole* country.

Under such conditions the industrial working class of the nation was bound to develop a tremendous superiority over the rest of the country, due to that process of education which modern industry unintentionally enforces on all who work for it. Compared to the mass of the backward peasantry, the mental, cultural and social achievements of the Russian workers were indeed tremendous. This was one of the reasons why Russian Socialists so readily adopted the Marxist doctrine that the coming revolution could only be carried through under the leadership of the industrial working class although Russia was so predominantly an agricultural country.

It is important, on the other hand, not to get wrong ideas about this “superiority”. Not only the peasants, but also most of the highly skilled working class had never learnt to read or to write. In their memoirs Russian revolutionaries described time and again how they were handicapped by the fact that even many of the members of their underground socialist circles were unable to read their own propaganda tracts and socialist literature; and how they used to

assemble secretly while one of their members—generally a young intellectual—read out to them aloud what they could not read themselves, but were eager to hear and understand.

None the less, the man who learnt successfully to handle a highly complicated modern machine underwent, by that very fact, a process of mental education which put him head and shoulders above the mass of the peasantry who had never learnt anything but to till their soil with medieval implements.

The capitalist class, on the other hand, never developed a corresponding social importance. Economically, they were largely dependent upon foreign capital while politically they depended upon the goodwill of the Tsarist forces of feudalism whom they never developed the strength or even the will to challenge for fear that they themselves might be swept away once a revolutionary movement against Tsarism had started. As history proved, this fear was only too well justified.

The outstanding features of pre-revolutionary Russia which were to have their significant bearing on the subsequent course of events can be summarised as follows:

(a) Tsarist tyranny rigidly suppressed any attempts on the part of the working class, and the poor peasants to form organisations which could successfully fight for their rights and, at the same time, educate their members in the art of democratic self-government.

(b) Political oppression apart, backward agricultural Russia lacked the very foundation on which alone a modern labour movement can arise and successfully strive for political power, i.e. a modern industrialised society which is largely dominated by the contrast between capital and labour.

(c) Because of its numerical as well as its social and political weakness the bourgeois middle class of Russia had no chance of leading a political revolution and replacing Tsarism by a system of capitalist democracy.

(d) On the other hand, Russia was ripe for a political democratic and, above all, an agrarian revolution. The mixture of ruthless tyranny, feudal and capitalist exploitation and the utter corruption of the Tsarist bureaucracy undermined the stability of the régime and produced in the mass of ordinary people such depths of hatred that Tsarism became more and more of a colossus with feet of clay whose collapse was merely a matter of time.

(e) In view of the general backwardness of the country the leadership of the revolution could only come from within the comparatively highly advanced industrial working class and its Movement which, in turn, was led by small groups of the revolutionary "intelligentsia" who had received a great deal of their political education and inspiration from Central European Socialism.

THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY

SUCH WAS THE background against which Lenin's Bolshevik Party was formed and developed. For its understanding it is important to keep this background in mind. For it was not so much the product of abstract principles and theories as the product of the peculiar circumstances from which it arose. It was deliberately created as an instrument of revolution, but as an instrument of revolution *in Russia* and not as a model to be imitated by the world at large.

Before the first world war neither Lenin nor any other member of his Party ever considered the peculiar features of the Bolshevik organisation¹ as an ideal model for working class organisations in general. On the contrary, prior to 1914 Lenin often expressed his admiration for the democratic European Labour Movements which based their programmes on Marxism, in particular for the German Social Democratic Party which, despite Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Law, had made tremendous progress in capturing the votes and the loyalty of the German working class. Many of the leaders of the German and Austrian Social Democratic Parties were repeatedly quoted in Bolshevik publications as the final authority on questions of dispute.²

It is important to remember this for the understanding of two things: (a) The peculiar organisational structure of the Bolshevik Party and its significance for the subsequent construction of the Soviet State and the Communist International, and (b) The attitude of the Bolsheviks to the Western Labour movements after 1914.

The Bolshevik Party was organised as a highly disciplined centralist cadre organisation. That is to say: only selected people could become members. A passive, merely contribution-paying rank and file membership was not tolerated. Every member was in fact an active and responsible officer, who had to submit rigidly to the decisions of the Central Committee and who devoted his entire life to the movement and risked it, time and again, for its cause.

The leadership of the Party consisted of men who, in the full sense of the word, were "professional revolutionaries". Theirs was the task

¹ Then, incidentally, not a Party proper, but merely a "Faction" of the Russian Social Democratic Party of which the Mensheviks formed the other "faction".

² Quite especially so Karl Kautsky who later on was denounced as the arch-traitor of Socialism and who was certainly very hostile to the Soviet State. In those early years, however, Kautsky, of all people, was quoted by Lenin in his famous pamphlet "What is to be done" in support of his own theory of organisation.

of giving political direction to the work of the Party, keeping the organisation together, maintaining contact between various branches inside and outside Russia, setting up new organisational groups: all this under the most difficult conditions, persecuted by the Tsarist Police, travelling into and out of the country and between various districts with false passports or no papers at all.

Lenin was not the first to adopt this principle of organisation for his Bolshevik Party. In this respect he merely continued the old tradition of Russian revolutionary movements. Forced underground by Tsarist tyranny, persecuted by the Police, and threatened by spies and informers they had no choice but to adopt some such form of membership selection and iron discipline if they wanted to survive at all.

There can be no doubt that the organisation of the Bolsheviks was well adapted to their peculiar purpose—as history proved. In view of the many legends, however, which subsequently were spread by the Communist Parties one thing must be made clear beyond doubt. The Bolsheviks themselves were then convinced that their conflicts and quarrels with other parties and groups of the international labour movement were of a *political and not of an organisational character*. They felt themselves at one with all labour organisations which they regarded as Marxist and revolutionary whatever their form of organisation. They were bitterly opposed not to democratic Parties as such, but to the non-Marxist and reformist tendencies in those Parties. The organisational form of their own Party did not, therefore, spring from any fundamental theories and principles which they conceived in deliberate contrast to the principles and theories of democratic Socialism which guided, for instance, the allegedly Marxist Social Democratic Party of Germany.

In Lenin's opinion, as well as in fact, the Bolshevik organisation was the product of the unique situation in Russia,—a situation which was "objectively" ripe for revolution, which produced boundless misery and hatred among the mass of the people, and which also produced spontaneous movements of solidarity and self-defence—industrial movements of the trade union type, for which Lenin created the general term "trade unionist". Yet, the Russian situation did *not spontaneously produce revolutionary political mass movements. It did not spontaneously produce political organisations which could effectively challenge and eventually overthrow Tsarism.*

The growth of such organisations as did develop was determined by the slow pace of capitalist development in Russia. In their character these organisations were naturally primitive and inexperienced, comparable to the beginning of British Trade Unionism at the time of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, but of an even smaller relative social significance.

The problem therefore for Russian Socialists was how to transform this spontaneous trade unionist movement which was one simply of

self-defence against capitalist exploitation and of mutual aid and solidarity, into a *political movement for the revolutionary overthrow of Tsarism.*

The struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of Tsarism was then by no means identical with the struggle for Socialism. For a socialist revolution all prerequisites were lacking. Industrialism had conquered but a small island in the vast Tsarist Empire. The aim, naturally suggested by the general backwardness of Tsarist Russia, was an agrarian and a democratic, but not a socialist revolution. Up to the first world war, therefore, the Bolsheviks (and other Russian Socialists) never even discussed Socialism as a practical programme for Russia.

They insisted, on the other hand, that the coming agrarian and democratic revolution must be led and directed by the industrial working class which alone could guarantee its success and modernise Russia so as to prepare the ground for Socialism at a later stage of development. The working class, in turn, was to be led by a revolutionary party which recruited its leadership chiefly from among the educated political intelligentsia.

The task which the Bolsheviks set themselves was therefore (a) to imbue the spontaneously growing trade unionist movement with the spirit of political revolution against Tsarism and with the idea of the hegemony of the industrial proletariat in that revolution and (b) to provide a leadership for this revolutionary movement.

Backward and illiterate though the mass of the Russian people were, the Bolsheviks understood that, without the active participation of these backward masses in the overthrow of the old Régime, without the full development of the spontaneous activity of the masses themselves, no revolutionary organisation, however determined and well prepared, could hope to win power in the country.

In developing these ideas they challenged other Russian revolutionaries in a threefold attack. In their insistence on the hegemony of the working class in the coming revolution they fought chiefly against the Narodniki who only thought in terms of a peasant revolution to be led by the intelligentsia and who believed that they could afford to neglect the numerically insignificant industrial working class.

Secondly, the Bolsheviks fought against those who expected that political pressure and economic exploitation by themselves would inevitably create revolutionary mass movements. Lenin did not believe that economic pressure would ever automatically produce anything but economic counter-pressure and self-defence. He witnessed the slow but inevitable growth of a trade union movement produced by capitalist exploitation itself in spite of all political persecution. But he did not expect this economic pressure and exploitation to create as inevitably a political revolutionary movement strong enough to overthrow Tsarism. In his writings on this question Lenin created

the term "economism" to indicate that type of thinking which expected political revolutionary movements to grow automatically with increased economic pressure and exploitation. He vigorously attacked and abused this "economism" and its defenders within the Social Democratic Movement of Russia.

Thirdly and not less vigorously he was opposed to those revolutionary organisations (chiefly the Narodnaya Volya) which, driven to despair by the backwardness and passiveness of the masses, tried to carry out the task of revolution for, on behalf of, and instead of the unorganised masses, by means of individual terror, assassinations, etc.

Instead the Bolsheviks considered it as their task—as Lenin himself formulated it—to create an independent, highly selective, highly disciplined body of professional revolutionaries—chiefly recruited from the ranks of the educated revolutionary intelligentsia—who were indissolubly linked to the mass of the people and would, at the decisive moment, take over their leadership and seize power.

Among Russian Socialists, a violent controversy arose around this expression: "Linked to the mass of the people." And the ideas which were behind this expression were in the last analysis responsible for the split of the Russian Social Democrats into a Bolshevik and a Menshevik faction.

What must, at that time, have appeared to most Socialists of Western Europe as merely academic, immensely theoretical and hairsplitting arguments, turned out to be a discussion about the fundamental principles of working class organisation and strategy. These principles proved to be of tremendous practical value, as was shown by the unique victory of the Russian Bolsheviks in October 1917.

3

THE SOVIETS

WHEN THE BOLSHEVIKS first developed their theory of the revolutionary Party that was to be "linked" to the mass of the people they had only very vague ideas as to how this link-up was to be achieved. It is true, they worked in, and tried to gain the leadership of, all the numerous small trade union and socialist circles that sprang up among the working class of the big cities and, to a lesser extent, in the villages. But all these circles and small organisations together embraced only a tiny section of the population and were themselves in bitter need of an effective "link" to the mass of the people.

This problem, however, was solved for them by history itself. At the critical moment the "link" proved to be in existence. They discovered it in the *Soviets*, i.e. the workers', soldiers', and peasants'

councils which sprang up first in the abortive Revolution of 1905 and then again in the course of the Revolution of 1917, when they became eventually the decisive instrument for the conquest of State power.

In contrast to the Bolshevik Party (or any other party, for that matter) the Soviets were not created as the result of any plans, programmes or preconceived ideas. They formed "themselves", so to speak, on the spur of the moment as the most direct, most primitive organisations of a hitherto unorganised spontaneous mass movement. In every village, every factory, every regiment the people got together and appointed their speakers, their delegates who were to represent their immediate interests and express their will.

In 1917, under the leadership chiefly of the two most important proletarian Soviets of Petrograd and Moscow—which in turn were led by the Bolsheviks—the Soviets developed as the only true representatives of the revolutionary masses, at the same pace as the Provisional Government (and the Parliament which supported it) ceased to represent them. The Provisional Government had been carried to power by the elementary force of the February Revolution. Its historic function would have been to put itself at the head of that revolutionary movement and give to the masses the three things they demanded: immediate peace, land, and some form of democracy. In that it failed miserably. The Provisional Government was determined to continue the war; and for fear of upsetting the war effort it postponed the immediate distribution of the land among the peasants.

This failure to secure peace and to make the agrarian revolution effective sealed the fate of the Kerenski Government and Parliament. Having failed in these two tasks they also failed in the third one, i.e. to make democracy effective. Parliament and other democratic institutions become a farce unless they are the bodies through which the will of the mass of the people can be expressed.

★ Democracy in revolutionary Russia of 1917 therefore developed outside Parliament. It developed in and through the Soviets.

Primitive though they were both in their political ideas and demands and in their form of organisation, the Soviets were the *only instruments* through which the otherwise "unorganised masses could act. Under the circumstances, they were the only possible vehicle through which the people were able to develop revolutionary mass initiative and mass action.

Without the full development of mass initiative and mass action no revolution can ever be victorious. The Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917 because they understood this fundamental principle of revolution and because they were not afraid of its practical consequences. In view of the fearful record of Tsarism, these consequences were bound to imply mass terror and revenge, the shedding of the blood of thousands of innocent as well as of guilty people, and the

senseless destruction of institutions which need not have been destroyed but could simply have been taken over and transformed.

Lenin understood what mass fury would do once it was let loose. But he also understood that the revolution could not be victorious without the elementary force of mass initiative and mass action. Hence his slogan which he untiringly hammered in until the victory of the October Revolution was secured: "All power to the Soviets!"

The fantastic success of the Bolsheviks—a tiny body of people who, prior to the February Revolution, counted altogether no more than a few hundred members—was based chiefly on their ability to "link" themselves successfully to the mass of the people when the decisive moment came.

They understood the elementary needs and desires of the people: (Land for the peasants and peace and bread for all) and in formulating and propagating these deepest and strongest desires as the chief slogans of the revolution they won the adherence of the people and of their direct representatives, the Soviets. They won them as any determined group of people, united in their purpose and accustomed to disciplined and concerted action, would win the support of a movement which had not yet found its final form of organisation and programme, and whose wishes and instincts they cast into clear and simple slogans and demands.

Thus the Soviets became not only the instrument through which the mass of the people carried through the revolution and established their own "Soviet Democracy". *They became simultaneously the vehicle through which the Bolsheviks eventually were to establish their Party Dictatorship.*

To establish a party dictatorship had never been the aim of the Bolsheviks. Prior to the Revolution they wanted, propagated and sincerely believed in the possibility of establishing a genuine workers' democracy that was dictatorial only against the capitalists and only for a transition period. A genuine workers' democracy was what they meant when they spoke of the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat". For some time they believed that "Soviet Democracy" was the form in which the dictatorship of the proletariat over the class enemy could become practical policy.

Yet, it turned out that this "Soviet Democracy" did not work. The attempt to combine a genuine working-class democracy with the necessity of suppressing the forces of counter-revolution by dictatorial means proved to be utterly illusionary. The Soviets were capable of destroying the old State apparatus and carrying out the Revolution just because of their spontaneous and primitively democratic character. But for that same reason they were incapable of organising the effective defence of the Revolution against its internal and external enemies. This task could only be achieved by some new central power which created its own State apparatus for that very purpose.

Thus the Bolsheviks found themselves forced first to reduce and eventually completely to destroy the power of the Soviets which had carried them to victory.

Even then they did not renounce their original idea of a workers' democracy. It must be borne in mind, however, that this conception of a workers' democracy was not identical with the ideas of democracy that are common in Western Europe.

In so backward a country as Russia democracy could have worked only if it was guided by a strong and determined leadership, whose continuity had somehow to be secured. Even while they still believed in the possibility of a genuine Soviet Democracy the Bolsheviks realised that these Soviets—although indispensable for carrying through the Revolution—were incapable of directing its course and leading it to any positive and constructive goal. They were ad hoc organisations, improvised for the direct and common action of the revolutionary masses. And these organisations which were formed spontaneously in the midst of the Revolution could not be and were not more advanced than the backward and illiterate mass of the Russian people whom they represented. The mass of the Russian people lacked all democratic experience, all political education, all training in self-government. They could not suddenly and automatically produce that unity of purpose, that conscious and deliberate striving towards a recognised goal, that understanding of all the complicated political, social and economic problems of a nation which are all indispensable if mass insurrection is to be transformed into a permanently victorious revolution.

This task could only be achieved by a capable and well prepared political party which could secure the leadership of the more primitive mass organisations. To provide this *leadership* for the mass organisations—and *not to rule them*—was the task which the Bolsheviks had originally set themselves. And even when the Civil War and the necessity to defend themselves against counter-revolution forced them to rule by dictatorial means they regarded their de facto establishment of the party dictatorship as a transitional phase which would be abolished as soon as the class enemies had really been wiped out and the masses of the people had learned to govern themselves. The official establishment of revolutionary Russia as the "Union of Socialist *Soviet* Republics" as well as the many pathetic attempts on the part of the Communist Parties of all countries to prove the truly "democratic" character of this or that Soviet institution and of the U.S.S.R. as a whole is ample proof of the importance which the Bolsheviks attached to this ancient ideal of Socialism.

The years of the Civil War and "War Communism" which followed the Revolution were the period during which the Bolshevik Party (or, the Communist Party as it then called itself) gradually wrung the newly won power from the Soviets and established its own Party-Dictatorship.

Already Trotsky, in building up the Red Army, had found it necessary to abolish the Soldiers' Councils which hampered the efficiency and striking power of the armed forces which were so badly needed in the desperate struggle against the well equipped, well trained, and well paid officers and soldiers of the counter-revolutionary armies of intervention.

One by one, all other democratic institutions and organisations were abolished or reduced to a mere sham existence. All political parties, including the Menshevik Socialists and the Left Wing Social Revolutionaries were suppressed. A powerful secret police force (the "Cheka", later re-christened "OGPU" or "G.P.U.") was set up. But the most visible turning point came when the Bolsheviks had to suppress by main force the rebellion that broke out in March 1921 at Kronstadt with the slogan of restoring democratic "Soviets without Communists".

The suppression of the Kronstadt Rebellion marked the definite end of "Soviet Democracy". The Communist Party had developed not merely into the "vanguard of the proletariat linked to the mass of the people", but into the *sole instrument of State power* as well.

The identification of the post-revolutionary Communist Party with the apparatus of the State became one of the determinants of Russia's internal development. In the course of time the Communist Party itself underwent fundamental changes. But the adjustments took some time to work themselves out. Its organisational principle, so-called "democratic centralism", has never been formally given up. In the early years freedom of speech and the right of various sections to advocate their policies were permitted. In the central organs of the Party official opposition groups functioned down to 1926. But even during Lenin's lifetime, democracy could only be maintained within the party because of his tremendous personal prestige and his ability to secure votes in the Central Committee in favour of his policies.

4

WAITING FOR WORLD REVOLUTION

THE ILLUSIONS ABOUT "Soviet Democracy" which the Bolsheviks had to bury, in practice if not in words, had their parallel in their early illusions about the character of the Western and Central European Labour Movements. Their attitude (and the changes in their attitude) to the non-Russian working-class movement has been of tremendous importance not only for the policy of the Comintern but for the internal development of the Soviet Union as well.

As we have pointed out above, prior to the first world war the Bolsheviks showed anything but their subsequent contempt and scorn

for the great democratic Labour Movements of Western and Central Europe. In particular they looked upon the Social Democratic Party of Germany as the truly revolutionary heir of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. For, the language of its leaders (not only of the small left-wing group around Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, but of the majority of the better known leaders) was radical and "Marxist" and the growth of their influence on the working-class of a rapidly industrialised Germany exceedingly great.

Germany then, the country with the most highly developed and modern industries in Europe, the most aggressive of all the rival imperialist States, the country with the most rapidly growing working-class movement under the leadership of a Party that seemed to carry on the proud tradition of the authors of the Communist Manifesto—this Germany surely was *the* classical country for the proletarian revolution.

So deep was Lenin's faith in the German Social Democratic Party than when in August 1914 he learned of their voting for war credits he first believed this piece of news to be a clumsy forgery of the Imperial Government.

It very soon became clear that there had been no forgery. The German Social Democratic Party—in common with all the other Labour and Socialist Parties of the countries involved (or at least their majorities)—supported their respective governments in a war which, only two years before at the International Conference at Basle, they had denounced as imperialistic and which they had pledged themselves to prevent by all the means at their disposal or—if they failed to prevent it—to try and exploit for the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Once it turned out that not a single one of the great parties of the Second International had made good its pledge, Lenin turned against the leaders and spokesmen of this policy of national collaboration with the cold fury of a man who suddenly discovers to his utter surprise that he is not surrounded by friends, but by traitors and that in future he will have to act alone, supported only by a tiny number of the truly faithful.

To answer the question whether or not the Social Democratic and Labour leaders who supported their governments in the first world war were really traitors is beyond the scope of this book. Be that as it may, for our present purpose it is only important to remember how utterly surprised the Bolsheviks were by the actual turn of events.

This surprise revealed for the first time how very little they understood of the working-class movement outside their own country. To this day, they have not overcome their lack of understanding of the non-Russian Labour Movement, unrivalled though Lenin's sense was of the particular problems and needs of Russia

From that August 1914 onwards the Social Democratic and Labour Movement of Western and Central Europe were regarded by the Bolsheviks as the chief social support of the bourgeoisie. To destroy and replace the leaders of these movements was, in Lenin's eyes, the first task of the "revolutionary workers".

Thus the former faith in the revolutionary character of the European Social Democratic and Labour Parties (always in the first place the German Party) was supplanted by *the faith in the revolutionary character of the proletariat as such* which would make its revolution without and against its former leaders who had so shamefully turned traitors.

Lenin knew that revolutionary movements must have (or create for themselves) centres of organisation if they are to succeed. The existing working-class organisations not only seemed inadequate for carrying through revolutions; having "sold" themselves to their imperialist rulers they even seemed to have become a positive handicap. Hence—so the Bolsheviks argued—new organisations had to be created: organisations which would be the new vessels for the revolutionary workers of the world and the adequate instruments with which to crush the traitors of the movement and, at the same time, to carry through the revolution.

If one believed—as the Bolsheviks then did¹—that the vast majority of the proletariat (with the exception only of a comparatively small layer of working-class "aristocracy") was revolutionary *by nature* and that the workers were merely prevented from following their natural revolutionary tendencies by the betrayal of their organisations and leaders, then the logical step was to create new leaders and new organisations which would carry out the task of revolution.

¶ The creation of the Communist International in 1919 can thus be understood only in connection with the Bolshevik theory that the world was ripe for revolution and that nothing was needed for the carrying through of this revolution but to replace the old rotten Labour and Social Democratic Parties and their false and treacherous leaders by genuinely revolutionary organisations.

So far only one organisation in world history had succeeded in achieving victory for the proletarian revolution—the Bolshevik Party. A truly revolutionary party had then to be modelled on the pattern of the Bolshevik organisation in order to be successful. Such was the trend of thought that led to the foundation of the Third International.

The communist faith in the approaching world revolution was so

¹ Previously, in his famous pamphlet "What is to be done", Lenin put forward a very different and, we believe, much more realistic theory about the nature of the working-class and its movement. This theory, however, he abandoned after 1914 in favour of the idea, put forward in his little book on "Imperialism, the last stage of capitalism," that Reformism was due to the fact that the capitalist class was able to bribe the top layer of the working-class with its extra profits drawn from imperialistic domination.

firm that Zinoviev, then the President of the newly founded Third International, prophesied publicly—without contradiction from anyone—in the first issue of its periodical, *The Communist International*, that, within a year, not only would all Europe be a Soviet Republic, but it would already have forgotten that it had ever had to fight for it.

In those first years it did not once really occur to the Bolsheviks that they would ever be faced with the problem whether or not it was possible to build "Socialism in one country alone". They realised the frightful difficulties of their task due to the general backwardness of their country. As we have seen, they had not even theoretically prepared for the possibility of building up socialism in Russia. But when, after their victory, they decided to try and solve this task, they hoped to do so with the aid of the more advanced countries of the West which would join them in hoisting the banner of the proletarian revolution.

At the beginning of their rule therefore they were, in their internal policy, essentially improvising and marking time until this aid from the West should come. Both "War Communism", which followed immediately upon the Revolution, and the "New Economic Policy" (NEP) which supplanted War Communism in 1921 were such periods of marking time and improvisation. Although two entirely different, indeed, opposite policies, they both had in common the fact that they were the practical answer to a given emergency. The first was the practical answer to the emergency of the Civil War; the latter the practical answer to the emergency of the threatening total collapse of Russian economy as a consequence of the Civil War and War Communism.

Neither War Communism nor the NEP were meant to be the basis for a socialist reconstruction of Russia. They were phases of improvised ad hoc measures designed to find some preliminary solutions to the most urgent problems of the day, until such time as the Russian Revolution was to be followed by other revolutions, at least in Central Europe, and the task of building up socialism could be undertaken as the common task of the European nations.

Not until much later did the Bolsheviks realise that these revolutions in other countries on which they had firmly counted and which they had tried to foment would not materialise. The Bolsheviks could not even count on the sympathy of the mass Labour Movement of the West, from whom they remained isolated. For the workers of the West refused to transform or desert their own movements and join the Communist Parties.

By 1924-25 the Bolsheviks were thus faced with the realisation that their revolution was isolated.

This isolation from the rest of the world, combined with the tremendous backwardness of their country, made the task which they

had set themselves a truly stupendous one. The subsequent development of the Soviet Union can be understood only in the light of these two chief factors: backwardness and isolation.→

When the revolutionary wave that had swept Central Europe after the end of the first World War had definitely ebbed without having anywhere achieved a workers' victory, two alternatives were open to the Bolsheviks. They could have abandoned their economy to a more or less "normal" capitalist development which would eventually transform Russia into a modern country. Had they done this they would have risked losing their newly won *political* power to the new commercial bourgeoisie in the towns (the so-called "NEP-men") and the richer capitalist peasants in the village (the "Kulaks") who were rapidly rising in influence and power after the introduction of the "New Economic Policy", which favoured them.

Or else they had to attempt the gigantic task of themselves setting about the modernisation of Russia. They decided to go on and to save the fruits of the Revolution.

The main lines of Russian development have resulted from the consequences of this decision. As we shall see, a great deal of Russian development has been due to the peculiar difficulty of trying to modernise an extremely backward country very rapidly without letting it enter upon a capitalist stage that would historically have been more "natural".

Externally, Russia has had the misfortune that this task had to be tackled during a period of advancing reaction in the rest of the world. No second great workers' victory has yet occurred to come to Russia's aid or to put a more advanced country at the head of socialist achievement. At the same time the Bolshevik isolation from the great Labour Movements of the West continued, and the danger of an anti-Soviet war, against which they would have to prepare, was ever present in the minds of the Bolshevik leaders.

Therefore, in most respects, the Bolsheviks had to set about their task in the least favourable circumstances and under the worst conditions.

PART II

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE U.S.S.R.

5

MODERNISING RUSSIA: THE NEED FOR SPEED AND SACRIFICE

HAVING MADE THE decision to try and transform backward agricultural Russia into a socialist country in spite of her isolation from the rest of the world, the Bolsheviks had to concentrate first of all on the task of industrialising and modernising their country. Without a highly developed modern industry and an equally highly developed industrial working-class socialist production is impossible.

The only way in which the task of modernising Russia could be achieved without allowing capitalism to develop was by a vast scheme of industrialisation combined with the mechanisation of agriculture under State guidance and State control.

The decisive steps in the new direction were taken in 1927 by the substantial liquidation of the New Economic Policy and in 1928 by the adoption of the First Five Year Plan. The most formidable of all the difficulties facing Russia was the *speed* with which this transition to modern conditions had to be made. It is important to understand how the necessity for this excessive tempo arose out of the conditions in which Russia found herself.

In most capitalist countries the process of industrialisation began with the production of consumption goods (chiefly textiles) and only gradually turned to the production of capital goods. Those countries which started their industrial development at a comparatively late stage of history and, like Russia, were faced with the problem of catching up with the more advanced countries in a short period of time, could do so largely with the aid of foreign capital.

Revolutionary Russia, however, could expect no aid from abroad, nor did she want to become dependent on foreign capitalists. The

war of intervention and the abuse heaped on the young revolutionary State by all the reactionaries of the world fixed in the minds of the Bolsheviks an undying distrust of all capitalists as their eternal and irreconcilable enemies. Their task therefore was not only to lay the foundations of a socialist society by industrialising their country and mechanising their agriculture, but also to do this independently and without the aid of foreign capital.

In order to modernise Russia on the basis of as high a degree of self-sufficiency as possible the Bolsheviks had to concentrate their efforts first and foremost on building up a production goods industry. That was the chief aim of the First Five Year Plan.

The Second Five Year Plan was originally designed to ease the strain which this forced pace of industrialisation had imposed on the Russian people. It provided for a greater extension of the production of mass consumption goods, which was to lead to a much improved standard of living for the people. However, the Second Five Year Plan coincided with the rising power of German Fascism and therefore the renewed menace of armed aggression against Russia. Thus the promise of rapidly improving living conditions in Russia had once again to be postponed. The necessity for speedy and powerful rearmament overrode all other considerations. The 22nd of June 1941 proved that the Russian fear of a Fascist war of aggression was only too real.

The need for the speedy creation of both a production goods industry and a vast arsenal for Russian defence was complicated by the necessity to solve a number of urgent subsidiary problems quickly if they were to be solved at all. The two most important of these were (a) the creation of an industrial working-class out of a nation of illiterate peasants and (b) the suppression of the individualist and capitalist tendencies of the peasantry which, during the NEP period, the Bolsheviks had found themselves forced to encourage in order to save their country from economic ruin. These potentially regressive and dangerous consequences of the NEP period had to be checked as quickly as possible and the State had to try and outdo the rate of development that could be achieved by the capitalist elements in the Soviet Union.

To sum up: Russia had to attempt in *one generation* to pass through a process that took centuries in other countries that went through a capitalist phase. In every country's history this phase of development witnessed disturbances and social divisions, sometimes degenerating into civil war. It is surprising that Russia has not suffered from more social upheaval than she has in this last quarter of a century.

The difficulty has been not merely one of compressing several centuries into a generation. In other countries this difficult stage was eased to some extent by the ability of capitalism gradually to bring greater abundance of consumer goods to at least large parts of the population.

But in Russia this period has been one of sacrifice. Ordinary capitalism in other countries developed out of the manufacture of consumption goods for an expanding market. In Russia modern economy had to be developed out of production goods, out of the establishment of fixed capital, such as factories, railways, power plants, and the like. This fixed capital, which was the only possible basis for a modern economy in Russia, could only be produced by limiting the consumption of the masses. The problem was made yet more difficult by the necessity of sacrificing consumption goods still further for the building of vast armaments.

This is a very significant characteristic of Soviet development which helps to explain much that has happened in that country. The building of Soviet society has involved a period of endless sacrifice, a fact that must never be forgotten when judging the political development of the Soviet Union.

However, before discussing the political consequences of the necessity to enforce these endless sacrifices upon the Russian people, we must examine in greater detail the chief economic problems which faced the Bolsheviks.

6

CREATION OF A PROLETARIAT

THE CREATION OF a modern industry, whether under conditions of free capitalism or of a planned industrialisation, involves the creation of a new mode of life accompanied by ideas that make this new life acceptable and coherent to the participants. Other countries achieved this end during their period of evolving capitalism by a variety of methods, including State regulation, harsh Poor Laws, the removal from the workers of all means of livelihood, Protestantism, etc.

In Russia, once again, this process had to be compressed into a very short period and had to be correspondingly intense. To some extent it has been done by propaganda, by trying to build up a special model morale in the Communist Party, by shock brigades, and so forth. But these methods were nowhere near enough. It was not merely a problem of disciplining an existing industrial labour force; for this force was being constantly reinforced by an influx from the backward and industrially quite uneducated peasantry. War conditions apart, this pressure will have to continue in Russia as long as this intake of peasants continues on a large scale.

Some years ago Low published a cartoon in which he showed a bewildered Russian peasant woman in a large modern factory trying to milk a machine—the only movement she understood and with which she was familiar. That cartoon put Russia's labour problem

in a nutshell, the problem of how to create, educate and discipline an industrial working-class, in the shortest possible time.

It was not sufficient to put enough men and women into the factories and see that they stayed there—which in itself was a big problem—but the task was also that of raising quickly the very low productivity of the untrained Russian labour force and of providing the workers with sufficient incentives for a growing increase in quantity as well as quality of output.

Under capitalism the incentive for more and better work is higher wages, that is to say the chance for better living conditions. In Russia where consumption had to be forcibly kept down, for reasons we have explained, this incentive could not be applied as a general measure.

Yet, it could be and was applied as a partial measure in the only way that was compatible with the necessity to limit mass consumption—in the form of *differentiation of wages*.

Differentiation of wages cannot be condemned as such. At the general level of production that existed in Russia (perhaps even at the general level of production still existing in the West) the raising of productivity can only be achieved by some differentiation of wages as an incentive.

Not even in Russia was it necessary to reduce the standard of the general population, nor was it necessary to have all the phenomena that have actually accompanied wage differentiation there; but some raising of wages for a minority was absolutely necessary.

Wage differentiation began to be gradually introduced in 1933-34. Graded wages for different categories of workers were established. The Soviet Government further considered it necessary to alter the old system of prices which gave greater purchasing power to the first part of a man's wages than to any additions he might have above the minimum. To achieve this, rationing (which had further helped to secure an equitable distribution of goods among the population) was abolished; and the prices in the "closed shops" (which were limited to workers and had considerably lower prices than the "open shops") were from 1933-34 gradually brought up to open-shop prices. To-day—apart from factory canteens—no closed shops exist.

To reinforce wage differentiation various honours and privileges—such as a disproportionate amount of house space—were given to a select section of labour, whilst the general body of workers were deprived of many of their former privileges.

To make these changes socially effective and, as far as possible, to win the workers' free co-operation, steps were taken to increase *wants*; so that workers should have an incentive to attempt to earn more wages. At a moment when the standard of living of the general mass was being reduced, an official propaganda began to the effect that the period of sacrifice was over and that now the joy of life and increased

self-indulgence was on the order of the day. At the same time (and again for the same purpose) family responsibility was emphasised; abortion and divorce were made more difficult.

Those who directly benefited from this development were the so-called Stakhanovite workers. They are privileged workers called after the miner Stakhanov who became famous for his prodigious output. There are no exact data as to their numbers, but it has been estimated that, prior to the outbreak of the war, they represented something between seven and ten per cent. of the industrial working-class, or between one and two million out of a total of seventeen million industrial workers.

Some Stakhanovites earn as much as twenty to thirty times the wages of the lowest paid Russian workers. According to official Soviet figures (*Plan Economy*, March 1937, and *Pravda*, November 29th, 1937), average earnings changed from 1936 to 1937 as follows:

heavy industry	+ 2%
timber industry	- 1.3%
light industry	+ 0.5%
building industry	+ 0.6%

With the exception of the timber industry therefore there was a slight increase in average earnings; but this was the period when the Stakhanov workers enjoyed a very *considerable* increase in their wages. It follows therefore that the practically stable average wage between 1936 and 1937 concealed *an increase for a privileged minority and in consequence a fall in the average wage of the majority of the workers*. This leaves out of account the fall in real wages due to rising prices, abolition of closed shops, etc. Thus, even to maintain his existing standard of living, it became necessary for the worker to work harder in order to get into a higher wage category.

To what extent this method of differentiation of wages (which incidentally was accompanied by a violent propaganda campaign against the unpatriotic "equalitarians" and "levellers") achieved its purpose of raising the productivity of human labour, must remain highly doubtful. Theoretically, it could have fulfilled the role of a universal incentive, by in fact giving *every* worker the chance to compete with his fellow workers for higher output and better quality of work, and thus to move up into the category of the privileged group of Stakhanovites.

In practice the mass of Russian workers have shown the same reluctance to develop a competitive spirit as workers do everywhere in the world both from a natural instinct of self-protection and from their experience which teaches them that their only power lies in solidarity.

The differentiation of wages and Stakhanovism produced something like a Russian working-class "aristocracy"—not a class by itself, but a clearly distinct section of the working-class whose privileges had to be paid for by the general mass of the workers.

The method of wage differentiation does not, however, seem to have produced the desired result, or at least not sufficiently so. This is indicated by a number of symptoms which all tend to show that methods of a different nature were regarded as necessary in order to raise the productivity of labour.

These new measures added to the economic incentive stricter disciplinary measures which were to overcome the symptoms of overstrain and of passive resistance against Stakhanovism. The most important of these disciplinary measures was the introduction of the *Labour Book* for all workers in January 1939. Entries must be made in this Labour Book giving details of the trade, craft or profession of its holder, the reasons for any changes of employment as well as particulars of the quality of the holder's work.

The introduction of the Labour Book was preceded by a propaganda campaign against lack of discipline, fluctuation and bad quality of output. There was a special campaign against the "Shuttlecocks" who wander from factory to factory, looking for better work and better pay and infecting their colleagues with this evil practice.

Other methods included the introduction of titles and orders such as "Hero of Labour", which corresponds to a high military honour.

A Decree was issued under the heading: "Measures for the Regulation of Labour Discipline, for the Improvement of the Social Insurance System and for the Fight against its Abuse." This Decree announced, among other things: holidays after childbirth were to be cut by half; *full* compensation for sick-leave was to be paid only after six years of work in the same factory (a percentage was to be paid immediately, *provided* the worker in question worked at least six months in the same factory, otherwise he would receive no benefit); managers were asked to exercise a stricter control; every worker or employee, who, within a period of a month, had infringed the regulations three times (or four times within two months) was to be dismissed as a "loafer", as a violator of labour discipline, and corresponding entries were to be made in his Labour Book.

There can be no doubt that the tremendous achievements of the Soviet Union, of which we shall speak in a later chapter, have been bought at a heavy price which the entire Russian nation has had to pay, including the industrial working-class in whose name the task of reconstruction was undertaken. It is not for us to blind ourselves either to the achievements or to the sacrifices which they entailed. Only by weighing these sacrifices against the achievements and by a clear distinction between those results which were inevitable and

those which were not, can we come to a true understanding as well as a true appreciation of Soviet development.

7

PERMANENT AGRARIAN REVOLUTION!

THE FIRST GREAT task of the Soviet Régime was to create, in a short space of time, out of a backward peasant population a modern and efficient industrial working-class. Their second great task was to adapt the agricultural population to the general requirements of the new State. In spite of all changes, Russia is even today a predominantly agricultural country. The solution of her very complicated agricultural problems is therefore one of her most important tasks.

The chief agrarian problem for the Bolsheviks can be briefly stated. In 1917 they were carried to power on the crest of the agrarian revolution. In this revolution the peasants seized the land and divided it up among themselves, thereby achieving their sole objective. This seizure and division of the land was the starting point for a new system of social differentiation. Feudalism had been definitely destroyed. But it had been destroyed by a revolution which laid the foundation for a *capitalist* class system. While the agrarian revolution had thus been the condition for the victory of the Bolsheviks its result represented a permanent menace to their very existence and all their aims. For them it was a question of life or death to overcome the "natural" capitalist tendencies of the peasantry. They did this by something like a "permanent revolution" in the countryside.

In addition, the Bolsheviks had to impose on the peasants special sacrifices in connection with the industrialisation of the U.S.S.R. The peasants had to make a *double* sacrifice: they had not only to sacrifice immediate consumption in order to make possible the mechanisation of agriculture, but they had also to give up their products with little or nothing in return in order to supply food to the town workers during the period of the building up of the capital goods industries. As a result, the Bolsheviks had constantly to coerce the peasants into growing and delivering up large quantities of grain, cattle, etc. at prices which they naturally regarded as inadequate.

On the other hand, the Bolsheviks could not solve the peasant problem simply by means of force. The peasants clung stubbornly to their newly won property and had their own ways of reacting against every act of State interference by passive resistance or even active sabotage. This was as dangerous for the Bolsheviks as the free development of a peasant-capitalism. For lack of co-operation on the part of the peasants immediately threatened the contry with starvation.

Not only had that to be avoided at all cost, but for the general task of modernising Russia it was as essential to raise the productivity of agricultural work as it was to industrialise the country speedily.

The problem therefore was how to augment agricultural productivity without allowing a capitalist development or, in other words, how to find sufficiently strong incentives to increase individual initiative and effort without allowing the development of economic individualism.

The Soviet Government met this difficulty by steering a zig-zag course between oppression of peasant capitalism by means of force and concessions to peasant individualism for the sake of encouraging the peasants' initiative and raising their productivity.

After the period of War Economism, which brought Russia to the verge of economic collapse, the peasants were given the liberty of trading their products on the market. The NEP phase was a period of far-reaching economic liberty, which strengthened the individualist and capitalist tendencies in the villages. In order to safeguard the food supply for the towns the Bolsheviks had, at that time, no choice but to take this course, dangerous though it was from the point of view of their general economic and political aims and for the security of their own power. As soon as the main purpose of the New Economic Policy had been achieved therefore, i.e. the restoration of some measure of economic stability and even prosperity, the Bolsheviks turned against the menace of "village capitalism".

The end of the NEP period was marked by the first crushing campaign against the "Kulaks" (rich peasants) in 1927. This was soon followed up during the period of the First Five Year Plan, by the violently terroristic phase of compulsory collectivisation which, once again, led Russia to the verge of economic collapse. The peasants reacted by killing practically all their livestock which, after 1930, resulted in a new period of famine for Russia.

Peasant resistance was, however, not the only reason why this policy of terror and compulsory collectivisation did not have the desired effect. The other reason was again Russia's general backwardness, which made it impossible to replace individual peasant farming speedily enough by an all-embracing planned agricultural economy. The mechanisation of agriculture was not yet far enough advanced, the State apparatus of distribution not yet sufficiently developed. Market relationships between the villages and the towns had to be maintained to a large extent and permanently threatened the smooth functioning of a planned economy. Moreover this market exchange reproduced, in a different form, the very problems that the Bolsheviks had tried to solve by their policy of compulsory collectivisation and extermination of the Kulaks. A second campaign against the Kulaks followed, in which hundreds of thousands of peasants were expropriated and sent to compulsory labour camps. Because of the catastrophic results of

this policy upon the agricultural output and the productivity of peasant labour a period of greater economic freedom then followed. The phase of the Moscow Trials coincided with a lessening of the pressure on the peasants.

But only a few years later, in 1939, a new campaign against "village capitalism" was launched, or rather against "private economy hidden behind agricultural collectivism", as the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party expressed it. What had happened was this: according to the Agricultural Constitution collective farmers were entitled side by side with their work on the "Kolkhoz" (Collective Farm), to work some land and raise some cattle and poultry for their private consumption or for sale for their own private benefit. According to the Soviet Government many peasants had grossly abused these rights and had become merely sham collective farmers who, in reality, worked only for their private profit.

To correct this situation the Soviet Government proposed to re-settle masses of collective farmers in new areas, to appoint State Commissions for fixing the amount of grain to be delivered to the State (this had formerly been done by local authorities), to reduce the amount of property which could be used for private benefit, to introduce exceptionally high taxes for privately owned cattle, etc., etc. All these proposals were made at the 18th Congress of the Communist Party which was held early in 1939. They showed one thing: although the Kulaks had definitely been exterminated, the Soviet Government considered it necessary to launch a third big campaign against "village capitalism" which had reappeared in the form of these "sham collective farmers".

This zig-zag course of agricultural policy was the direct result of the two contradictory tasks which the Soviet Government had to solve. On the one hand they had to raise agricultural productivity and for that purpose to provide the peasants with a sufficiently strong incentive. On the other hand they had to prevent a new capitalist development. They solved these contradictory tasks by encouraging private initiative and tolerating the growth of a new class of village capitalists for a *certain period of time* and by *periodically* exterminating these new village capitalists, when their power threatened to become dangerous.

There is no doubt that these periodical "purges" and periods of compulsory collectivisation could have been less ruthless and terroristic than they were. On the other hand, the Soviet Government had no choice but to adopt something like this zig-zag course in its agricultural policy and—war conditions apart—will have to continue to do so until the mechanisation of agriculture has been completed and the apparatus of distribution which the State is building up has become sufficiently all-embracing to be able to supplant market relationship between town and villages and thus prevent the reproduction of capitalist tendencies.

ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

THE DIFFICULTIES DESCRIBED in the previous chapters and the sacrifice imposed on the Russian people for the sake of overcoming these difficulties can be appreciated in their true significance only if compared to the actual achievements of Soviet reconstruction.

No one can deny that these achievements have been tremendous. No other country has made similar progress in developing its productive forces in so short a period. In speed of development Russia is far ahead of all capitalist countries. Compared with 1913 there has been a *ten-fold increase* in Russia's heavy industrial production, while in the same period German production, for example, has advanced by only 50%. And, in contrast with all capitalist countries, the rate of Russian advance has been almost uninterrupted. This fact becomes even more impressive if one remembers that Russia, during this period, went through the world war, civil war, and two periods of actual famine. As early as 1937 80% of all industrial products and 90% of all agricultural machines such as tractors and combines came from factories which had been newly built or entirely reconstructed since the beginning of the First Five Year Plan.

The progress in agriculture is no less impressive. Collectivisation and mechanisation have resulted in a vast increase in output, although the agricultural population has been steadily declining in numbers. In 1926 an agricultural population of 120 millions under NEP conditions could produce an extremely good harvest that was worth 14.8 milliard roubles. Two years ago an agricultural population that was 6 million smaller than in 1926 could produce a good harvest that was worth 3.7 milliard roubles more.

Towards the end of the NEP period individual peasants and craftsmen represented 75% of the Soviet population; NEP-men and Kulaks, 5% of the population. Today, there are neither NEP-men nor Kulaks and the number of individual peasants and craftsmen has decreased to 5.6% of the total population. 55% of the population are working on 243,000 collectives, which are composed of 18 million farms.

Without going beyond the framework of this book we cannot do more than merely indicate the tremendous economic progress that has been made; a progress which has also been implemented by a great cultural advance. Illiteracy has practically disappeared. Factories and collective farms have been equipped with up-to-date clubs, libraries, theatres, cinemas, crèches, hospitals and laboratories for the

benefit of the working people. All these things have been described in great detail in many books.

However, even with this tremendous progress, the Soviet Union has not "caught up and overtaken" Western capitalism absolutely, but only in the *tempo* of development. Production per head of the population is still very much lower than in Western Europe or in the United States. The standard of living, too, is still much lower than that of the working-class in Western Europe and America (with the exception of the comparatively small section of privileged Stakhanovites). On the other hand, even for the whole population, the standard of living is certainly higher than that of the working population under the Tsarist Régime.

The real test of Russian economic development cannot, however, be found in a comparison of figures. The real, indeed the supreme, test of what Soviet reconstruction has achieved came on June 22nd, 1941, when Hitler ordered his army to march against the Soviet Union. The months which have passed since have proved one thing beyond doubt. Not only can Soviet Russia rely on her men and women to fight for their country to the last drop of their blood, but her industry, transport and agriculture have been proved to have attained the technical level which is necessary to equip a modern mechanised army and, what is more, to keep it fighting in the field against an enemy which can boast of the most vast and modern military and industrial organisation in the world.

In the light of this experience one must come to the conclusion that, *in the economic sphere, Russia's achievements by far outweigh the cost and sacrifice they have rendered necessary.*

However, Soviet development must be seen and judged as a *whole* : in its political as well as in its economic aspects. The political problems of Soviet development are discussed in the following chapters of this book. Throughout they have been tainted by the economic and social difficulties we have just examined and their appreciation depends almost entirely upon an understanding of these difficulties.

PART III

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE U.S.S.R.

9

TOTALITARIAN DICTATORSHIP

WHY DID A totalitarian party dictatorship develop in Russia? This question is not only in the minds of those who want to understand the development of the Soviet Union. It is the question which every socialist must ask who wants to know whether or not the Russian development has proved as Utopian his cherished hope that one day mankind may enjoy, through a system of centralised State planning, at the same time both individual liberty and economic security and prosperity.

What Russian development proves for socialism in general we shall discuss in a later chapter. First of all we must examine this development itself and its underlying causes.

The origin of the Bolshevik dictatorship is comparatively easy to understand. It grew out of the civil war and the necessity to create an entirely new central State apparatus, which had to defend itself against counter-revolution. There was no other way but that of a dictatorship.

However, this dictatorship was not limited to the transitional period necessary for the crushing of the counter-revolutionary forces. On the contrary, the party dictatorship was not fully developed until *after* the end of the civil war and the defeat of the armies of intervention. Ever since then, from year to year, the dictatorship has become increasingly rigid.

The explanation of this phenomenon must be sought in the peculiar task which the Bolsheviks set themselves and the circumstances under which they had to carry it out. In the preceding chapters we have discussed these problems at some length. The task, as we have seen, was tremendous and the circumstances, on the whole, most unfavourable.

This involved the Russian people in a long period of sustained sacrifice, a burden so heavy that it could only be shouldered *if it were imposed from above*.

It could, on the other hand, not be imposed simply by force and by the same methods by which Tsarism had enforced its rule. The Bolsheviks could impose the heavy burden only if they succeeded in rousing the will of the people to shoulder this burden. *They had the dual task therefore of (a) sacrificing the comfort and happiness of the living generation for the sake of future generations and (b) making the Russian people accept this sacrifice.*

This dual task led to that peculiar mixture of violence and mass propaganda which is characteristic of every modern totalitarian dictatorship.

This mixture can be found in every phase and every sphere of Soviet development. The task of enforcing the industrialisation of so vast and backward a country as Russia without any aid from abroad and without allowing domestic capitalism to develop involved a whole series of unpopular methods. As we have seen, the most important of these were:

(a) Rigid restriction of mass consumption for the sake of the construction of capital goods and armaments.

(b) Rapid increase in the productivity of human labour which implied longer working hours, stricter labour discipline, greater concentration on quality, all of which are tremendous demands on the mass of illiterate peasants' sons, untrained in industrial production.

(c) Periodical suppression of the politically dangerous class of "village capitalists", whose growth could not yet be prevented by economic means alone.

None of these things could have been achieved democratically. The existence of free trade unions would have been incompatible with the need for the sustained restriction of mass consumption. The democratic right of forming political parties for the representation of certain class or group interests would have been incompatible with the necessity to prevent the growth, stabilisation and political influence of village capitalism.

But while, under the circumstances, the Bolsheviks had no choice but to dictate, they could do so only if the Russian people could be made to accept this dictatorship as a whole as well as in its individual measures. Hence the incessant attempts on the part of the Soviet Government to explain and justify every one of its acts. Hence its permanent propaganda appeals, its public "self-criticism", its "elections", its "New Constitution of 1936", and the whole fictitious building of a sham "Soviet Democracy".

The Russian system of government has nothing in common with a democracy. The people in Russia do not govern themselves, either directly or through their freely chosen representatives. They are ruled, locally as well as centrally.

The holding of "elections" in Russia does not disprove this. In a One-Party-State, where opposition is identical with high treason, elections become meaningless, because the electorate has no alternative. The only choice put before the people is that of expressing their confidence in the party leadership—which is the State—or withholding it. Dependent though the Soviet Government is upon these "votes of confidence" they do not transform Bolshevism into democracy.

They make the Bolshevik dictatorship plebiscitary; that is to say, a dictatorship which relies as much on the consent and support of the people as on the use of force; a dictatorship for which mass appeals and crude propaganda speeches are as important as a secret police and mass purges; a dictatorship which can ruthlessly kill thousands of its own citizens and yet muster the loyalty and faith of millions.

While the Russian Government thus certainly is not a government *by* the people, it may claim that it is a government *for* the people, if not for the living then for the future generation. It may also claim that it possesses, in fact, the *consent* of the people to this dictatorship and its aims. For proof of this we do not rely on election figures and votes of confidence in the State and Party leadership, the value of which must be regarded as extremely doubtful.

The real proof comes from Russia at war, Soviet Russia at her supreme test. As we all know, Hitler was not the only one to be mistaken when he expected that the Stalin régime would crack up under the impact of the onslaught, that the Ukrainians and other nationals would cut loose and the Soviet State collapse. Even the Nazi Front reporters admit now that they have never come across anything like the courageous and dogged defence of the Russian troops who went on fighting even when retreating or surrounded, men and women, soldiers and civilians alike.

The Stalin Régime has proved stable—much stabler than the enemies of the Soviet Union and even many of her friends thought possible after its many severe crises and ruthless purges.

For many, this has been a new and surprising discovery, particularly for those Western Europeans and Americans who judged the Russian development from the point of view of their own standards. From that angle they not only gained a distorted impression of the economic progress made, which they compared with the standards achieved in their own countries, but they also misunderstood the essential factors of Russia's political development.

Whatever British and other non-Russian socialists may think of the absence of democracy in Russia, there can be no doubt that they must have a different attitude to this question than the Russian people have themselves.

The Russians have never known democracy as a living reality. They have not exchanged individual liberty for individual economic

security, as, for example, the Germans did when Hitler came to power.

The Russian people did not have to give up democracy and freedom when the Bolsheviks seized power because they had never possessed either. It is fair to assume therefore that they also suffer less from the absence of individual liberties than Western Europeans would under similar circumstances, precisely because of this complete lack of democratic and liberal experience.¹

On the other hand there are, under the present totalitarian and plebiscitary dictatorship, very little prospects for the Russian people of gaining the experience of self-government on which a living democracy must be based.

To sum up: when the Bolsheviks decided to retain their dictatorial rule even after the end of the Civil War they did so in order to create the indispensable economic prerequisites for a planned socialist society. Theoretically this dictatorship would become superfluous if and when the following four conditions had been fulfilled:

(a) The progress of industrialisation must be sufficiently great to allow a steady increase in the standard of living of the entire working population.

(b) The mechanisation of agriculture and the development of the State apparatus for the planned distribution of goods must be sufficiently advanced to remove the economic roots of recurrent village capitalism and to allow a fully planned production and distribution of agricultural products.

(c) National security must not be threatened either by war or the menace of war.

(d) The practical political education of the mass of the people must be sufficiently developed to enable them to govern themselves wherever that is compatible with a centrally planned society² and to exercise an effective control over the State bureaucracy.

None of these four conditions has yet been fulfilled in Soviet Russia; the first three, at least, for objective reasons, which are the fault neither of a party nor of an individual.

As to the fourth condition, it must be stated that the Stalin Government—for whatever reasons—has done nothing to give the Russian people a political education in this particular sense. It has done nothing to give the Russian people a practical training in applied democracy. On the contrary, the deliberate disguise of the totalitarian dictatorship

¹ This statement is true only, of course, with regard to the general mass of the Russian people. It is not true for the former intelligentsia whose ideas on liberty and democracy are very similar to those of Western Europe, but who form only a very small percentage of the population.

² This problem of the compatibility of self-government with a centrally planned economy is discussed in detail in Chapter 14.

as a sham democracy, its crude and dishonest propaganda methods, its leader worship, its development towards a secular religion, etc., etc.—must all have had the effect of a *negative political education*, which only adds to the difficulties that stand in the way of an eventual development of democracy in the Soviet Union.

Any totalitarian system must be demagogic and plebiscitary. It cannot permit the play of the ordinary ideas and interests proper to democracy. It must falsify issues and every policy must be a fight against enemies, internal or external, or often combined. In Russia all this became even more exaggerated because the backward mass of the peasantry—the real public opinion in the country—was not sufficiently developed to regard political disputes as differences of interests. Such differences could not be presented to them at all as merely political issues. They could only understand them if they were presented on a mythical or pseudo-religious basis, as struggles of the régime against the enemies of the people.

This difficulty has grown greater rather than less with the development of the Soviet Union. It has become more and more of a vicious circle. The more the Soviet Government pursued its policy of demagogic and mythical propaganda the less capable did the people become of judging political and other issues on their real merits and the more necessary did it become to continue with this policy of “negative education”.

Moreover, increasingly large masses of the peasantry have had to be drawn into public life. Lenin never spoke to an audience of more than ten million. Stalin must address a public of 185 million. Thus Lenin could introduce major changes of policy, such as the NEP reversal, without great social disturbance and on the level of political argument. Stalin, on the other hand, has to descend to the mystical level and make public trials and purges out of mere differences of opinion about means or even mere administrative maladjustments.¹

This growing necessity to paint every issue in terms of deepest black or purest white, to seek out national enemies not merely in politics, but in the industrial, administrative, technical, and scientific fields,

¹ In their sharpest form these tendencies were expressed during the Moscow Trials, when the world witnessed not merely a new wave of large-scale terrorism, but also the gruesome spectacle of dozens of Lenin's “Old Guard”—who since their childhood had given up all claims to personal happiness and defied prison and death for the sake of the Revolution—being denounced and, what is more, denouncing themselves as Fascist agents and traitors. Hitler's subsequent assault on the Soviet Union does not make these charges more credible, as a number of people seem to think. We cannot deal here with the Moscow Trials. But to all those who want to understand how these strange events were psychologically possible we would warmly recommend Arthur Koestler's book, *Darkness at Noon*, which—although in the form of fiction—gives the only adequate psychological explanation that is known to us of that period of Russian history.

has had a very bad effect on Soviet administration. The social earthquakes that are from time to time necessary in every totalitarian country cause disturbing waste and undermine readiness to take responsibility. Because of Russia's backward state she has had to undergo more of these upheavals than Nazi Germany. One of her essential needs—the building up of a stratum of technicians and administrators—has been seriously impeded by this necessity.

This “negative political education”, as well as the undeniable fact that, in the course of the last ten years or so, the Party Dictatorship was not only maintained in Russia but became more and more rigid and assumed an increasingly personal character, has led many observers to look for *other* reasons than those stated by us to be at the root of what they call “the degeneration of the Bolshevik dictatorship”.

Chiefly three reasons have been given by different political schools of thought. One group asserts that the cause of the maintenance and petrification of the Party dictatorship is—its original establishment! They argue that the Communist Party of Russia, automatically and as a matter of course, developed the same tendency as *every* ruling group anywhere in the world: namely to keep itself in power at all cost. Having started as a dictatorship, it had got hold of the *means* of keeping itself in power—such as Police Force, Army, administration of justice, legislation, etc. But the more use it makes of its dictatorial means the more it must degenerate into a personal tyranny. This theory is widespread among Right-wing labour circles.

The second theory consists of the essentially liberal argument that a totalitarian dictatorship is the necessary result of a centrally planned and controlled economy and the simultaneous development of the State bureaucracy to a new ruling class. The practical experiences of the Soviet Union and of Nazi Germany are generally quoted in support of this argument.

In our view both these arguments are unconvincing because they are unhistorical and completely abstract. They can neither explain the fundamental difference between the Bolshevik and the Fascist dictatorship, nor any of the concrete problems of the development of either.

According to the third theory (put forward by Trotsky and his followers) the “bureaucratic degeneration” of the Communist Party dictatorship is due only to the isolation of the Russian Revolution. This “bureaucratic degeneration”—the Trotskyites argue—will disappear and the pseudo-communist dictators will be overthrown as soon as the Russian isolation has been broken and proletarian revolutions have been victorious in other countries.

This argument is no more tenable than the other two, because it fails to distinguish between two *essentially different* things—the problem of bureaucracy and the problem of a totalitarian dictatorship. Bureaucracy can never disappear from a planned society, whether it is isolated

or not. The totalitarian dictatorship, however, arose and was maintained for quite different historical reasons, as we have seen.

We must, however, examine the problem of bureaucracy more closely, not because we regard it as the cause of the petrification of the Communist Party dictatorship in the Soviet Union, but because of its importance, in other respects, for the development of the Soviet Union as well as for the struggle for a planned socialist society everywhere in the world.

10

BUREAUCRACY

ANY PLANNED ECONOMY inevitably involves the rise of a bureaucracy; it is not at all a necessary sign of reaction. If we rid ourselves of the habit of regarding the word "bureaucracy" as a term of abuse, we must come to the conclusion that a bureaucracy is as indispensable to a modern society as an industrial working class. Modern development makes necessary a new stratum of leading officials, technicians, managers, etc. The idea of a simple classless society in which everyone will have interchangeable functions and anyone can occupy positions of authority or be an "expert" has proved to be utterly illusory.

The original idea of Marx and Lenin that, in a socialist society, the division of labour would disappear, that is to say the division into directive and managerial work, on the one hand, and work executed to instructions, on the other, can no longer be regarded as feasible. Lenin's famous slogan—"every cook will be able to govern the State"—is not likely to be realised, at least not for some generations to come.

In fact, the need for a specialised army of technical, industrial and managerial experts and their social importance grow in direct proportion to the general advance of technical progress and higher forms of economic organisation. That is true not only for a planned society but also for modern capitalism. The difference is only that under capitalist conditions most of these experts, supervisors, managers, economists, statisticians, industrial chemists, etc., are the private employees of private enterprises who use their knowledge and skill for the benefit of competing vested interests. They do not appear therefore as a bureaucracy although their social function is a very similar one.

In a planned society, which is freed from private property, these experts and managers form a growing part of the State Bureaucracy. Their task is not confined to that of giving expert advice. It is also their function to assume responsibility for making decisions and for supervising day-to-day administration. In this function they are not

only needed in the higher organs of society, but at every stage of production and organisation, where they must have the power of command and responsibility.

It is because of this latter function that bureaucracy becomes a political problem. It is for this reason, too, that many observers have come to regard the Soviet Bureaucracy as the new ruling class of Russia, which fulfils its function no longer in the interest of the Soviet State as a whole, but exclusively in its own interest as individuals and as a class.

In support of this argument it has been pointed out; (a) that the Soviet bureaucracy is all-powerful in its decisions and not subject to the control of any democratic bodies; (b) that the Soviet bureaucracy enjoys a great number of privileges, such as higher income, more housing space, etc., than the industrial workers (apart from the upper stratum of Stakhanovites); (c) that the Soviet bureaucracy, as a body, has an increasing influence on *general* policy and the conduct of the affairs of State.

Let us examine these arguments, one by one. To start with: it is perfectly true that the Soviet bureaucracy is not subjected to any democratic control. Before drawing hasty conclusions from this fact, one must examine this expression "democratic control". First of all, democratic control *cannot* mean that this control renders bureaucracy in fact superfluous or that the bureaucrats could in any way be replaced by democratic workers' committees with authority over them. This is impossible not only because such democratic workers' committees would lack the necessary expert knowledge, for which they have not been trained, but also because no planned economy can function without a stratum of people who can guarantee the continuity of economic life by accepting final responsibility and exercising the power of command.

Democratic control of the bureaucracy can only mean (a) that the general line of policy which the bureaucracy has to execute is not dictated by the bureaucracy itself, but agreed upon in a democratic way, and (b) that the members of the bureaucracy are answerable to democratic bodies.

Of these two the first point is by far the most important. To arrive at a policy in a democratic way can only mean to find a *working compromise between various interests*. But this requires a situation in which the conflict between different interests is not so sharp that compromises become in fact objectively impossible. Wherever that happens democracy will anyhow cease to function—planned society or not—and be replaced by a dictatorship. The objective impossibility of arriving at a working compromise between various existing interests is at the root of every modern dictatorship.

A genuine compromise between various interests requires moreover

the free representation of these various interests and the unhampered functioning of representative bodies. In other words, it requires the free right to combine, to form independent trade unions and political parties and the right of free speech and criticism.

Yet, even these rights as such are not sufficient for an effective democratic control unless the people who are to exercise this control are (a) *economically secure* (so that they can put their minds to other things than their personal worries); (b) have enough *leisure time* to devote to the problems involved; and (c) a sufficiently high standard of general education to study and grasp the facts and problems in question.

All these conditions are lacking in the Soviet Union, as we have seen. The absence of democratic control is therefore not a sign of a "bureaucratic degeneration" of the Party dictatorship in Russia. But democratic control of the bureaucracy has not been possible in Russia for the same reason that democracy as a general political system has not yet been possible.

Under different conditions, planned economy and the bureaucracy it produces are perfectly compatible with political democracy. The exaggerated power of the Soviet bureaucracy is the *result* of the absence of democracy, and *not its cause*.

The second argument brought forward by the "anti-bureaucratic" critics of Soviet Russia is the privileged position of the Soviet bureaucracy. Privileges there certainly are. But one must understand the origin of these privileges. During the first years after the revolution the Soviets were in dire need of experts of all kind. They had, to a considerable extent, to be content with experts from abroad or such Russians as had received their training under the Tsarist Régime and had worked for it. In order to attract these people who were either non-political or only half-hearted supporters of the Revolution, the Bolshevik Government had to grant them certain privileges, high salaries which correspond to the salaries in capitalist countries and a number of other advantages.

At the same time the Communists—in many cases rightly—deeply distrusted these experts whom they needed, but who belonged to the class of the enemy. While enjoying a number of material advantages, these foreign or formerly Tsarist specialists, as far as politics were concerned, were regarded as second class citizens. For them to become members of the Communist Party, for instance, was an extremely difficult thing even if they were genuinely convinced Communists.

In the course of time the young Soviet State created its own intelligentsia and technicians and experts. They grew out of the working class and, to some extent, the class of collective farmers. The foreign specialists disappeared. But even for the new Soviet bureaucracy the old system of a combination of material privileges and political disadvantages was maintained until very recently.

The material privileges which the new bureaucracy enjoys as a whole, are not very considerable. The same system of differentiation has been established among the bureaucracy as among the industrial working-class, and for the same reason, i.e., as an incentive for more and better work. The lower strata of the bureaucracy earn in many cases less than industrial workers. Only about 20% of the whole bureaucracy earn considerably more than the average worker. They also enjoy a number of other material privileges.

Apart from a very small number of artists and writers who have incomes quite out of proportion to the rest of the population, the highest salaries are paid to factory managers, the so-called Red Directors. In Magnitogorsk, for instance, the salary of the Red Director is seven times as high as the average wage and he gets thirty times as much house space as the workers.

In other words, the top layer of the bureaucracy is certainly materially privileged compared to the ordinary worker. The value of these privileges must not, however, be exaggerated for they are in no way comparable to the differentiation of income in capitalist countries. Moreover, the differentiation of wages between the Stakhanovite workers and the lowest paid workers is considerably greater than that between the bureaucracy and the industrial proletariat as a whole.¹

The third argument of those who regard the Soviet bureaucracy as the new ruling class of Russia is their growing influence on all political and general decisions. There is no doubt that this also is a fact, although one that is more difficult to establish. We shall have to say more about this point in the following chapter. But this much must be said here: the growing influence on general policy of so indispensable a section of society is only to be expected. *Neither this increased general influence, nor the absence of democratic control, nor the privileges which they enjoy, make the Soviet bureaucracy a class of its own.* And this chiefly for three reasons.

(a) The material privileges of the Soviet bureaucracy are exclusively confined to the sphere of consumption. They cannot use their income as private capital, that is to say as a source of profits and means of exploitation.

(b) Their children and relatives cannot inherit from them their position of power and influence.

(c) Socially they recruit themselves from the industrial workers and collective farmers, and this process of recruitment continues. There are no barriers of either money, social position or monopoly of education

¹ According to a statement by Molotov the "intelligentsia" (that is the bureaucracy) comprises altogether about thirteen to fourteen per cent. of the Soviet population. It must be regarded as doubtful whether this figure includes the great number of "political bureaucrats", i.e. full-time secretaries of the Communist Party and its subsidiary organisations.

which could prevent ordinary workers and collective farmers or their sons and daughters from rising to the ranks of the bureaucracy.

If ever the Soviet bureaucracy became a closed, self-perpetuating social group, it would then acquire the characteristics of a class. But so long as each new generation of the bureaucracy is recruited afresh from the best available talent throughout the masses of the population, it constitutes merely a functional group—essential in any modern society. To speak of the Soviet bureaucracy as the new ruling class of Russia is therefore a misuse of terms. On the other hand, it remains perfectly true that this bureaucracy has exercised an increasingly great influence on the development and policy of the Soviet Union. The best demonstration of this is the transformation of the Russian Communist Party itself.

I I

THE COMMUNIST PARTY TRANSFORMED

LENIN'S ORIGINAL CONCEPTION of the role of the Bolshevik Party (and subsequently the Comintern and its national sections) was that of the "vanguard of the proletariat". Now, as long as the struggle for power remains undecided, no Party can simply *proclaim* itself as the "vanguard of the proletariat" without the consent of the working class to its leadership. This, one would think, is so nearly a truism that it should be quite unnecessary to emphasise it. But there are still a great number of people who have not understood this simple truth—most of them to be found in the various Communist Parties or the small groups that split away from the Communists.

The original Bolshevik Party, in contrast, understood very well that, in order to get into power, it had to work "democratically", i.e. to secure a majority among those who alone were able and willing to destroy the very roots of Tsarism—the Soviets. At that stage, the Bolsheviks had no other means of power at their disposal than any other Party. They had democratically to compete with all other parties for the role of leadership.

Once they felt that they had secured this position—at least among the most important proletarian Soviets in the big cities—they struck. And while proclaiming Soviet Power they assumed, in fact, power for themselves. It is true that they received their legitimisation subsequently from the democratic Soviet Congress; but by that time they had already firmly established themselves as an independent power.

That was the starting point for the complete transformation of the character of the Communist Party. While it did not become visible until much later this transformation began in fact at the very moment

when the victory of the Revolution had been secured. It was not a transformation deliberately aimed at or even foreseen. On the contrary, many of its unhappy consequences are chiefly due to the fact that this transformation was *not* foreseen as an inevitable one and that it was therefore neither directed nor controlled.

The new Communist Party had become the sole instrument of State Power. In this connection the terms "old" and "new" do not, of course, refer to any change in personnel. They only refer to the changed *function*. The deceptive appearance of continuity is chiefly due to the fact that the personnel remained the same while the functions changed fundamentally.

As the new State apparatus the Communist Party built up its special instruments of power, i.e. its Army, Police Force, propaganda machine, etc.; and, *with the aid of these newly created instruments of power, it grew increasingly independent of the democratic consent of the proletariat in whose name it had achieved its victory.*

Once the decision to modernise backward Russia speedily and without foreign aid had been made, it could be carried out only at the expense of the living generation both of workers and peasants who had to shoulder the burden of the sacrifice for the sake of future generations. But that meant that the new State authority could not act in the interest of the contemporary proletariat as a *class*. As a State authority that was first and foremost concerned with the task of industrialisation and collectivisation (and therefore deliberate restriction of consumption) the Communists could not allow Soviets, Trade Unions and other democratic working-class organisations effectively to represent and fight for the day-to-day interests of the workers. That had become incompatible with the accepted national aim.

As a Party, on the other hand, the Communists had fought for and seized power in the name and interest of the working class.

The conflict arising from this dual and contradictory role of the Communist Party was inevitable. But the solution which the Communists found for the very difficult problem it presented was probably the worst that could be conceived.

They suppressed democracy in fact, but maintained it as a fiction. They did not abolish the Soviets, Trade Unions, etc. They merely condemned them to a sham existence. They acted in fact in the national interest—and chiefly in the interest of their national future—but they continued to act in the name of the class interest of the industrial proletariat.

In these conditions, the question of democracy in Russia turned on whether democracy could at least be retained *inside* the Communist Party itself and later be extended to the people at large. Would it prove possible to maintain democracy inside a Party that had become identical with the State apparatus? Or would democratic forms here, too, be doomed to become a sham?

The Party was in fact cut down to about a million members; but at this figure it was still a mass organisation. It was hoped that the large number of rank and file membership would act as the "link" between the Communist leadership and the population at large; that they would be an instrument for carrying the decisions of the government to the masses of the workers and peasants.

But because the Communist Party was at the same time the instrument of State power it had to be turned into an obedient civil service. The attempt to retain democratic forms inside the Party in circumstances in which full democracy was impossible was doomed to failure from the outset.

The maintenance of the fiction of democracy not only for the country as a whole but also inside the Party under circumstances where democracy could not become real had serious consequences. Within the ruling Party circles, which were in fact the governing body of the State, there arose inevitable disputes on major questions of policy. Rival factions developed that naturally made use of the democratic forms of the Party in order to gain support for their various lines of policy. But because these political differences were fought out inside a Party that was at the same time the State apparatus *every one of these differences became a struggle for power in the State.*

An inevitable further consequence was that inner-Party disputes were not limited to major questions of policy. Details of economic planning, which should have been settled by a small executive on the basis of data and plans drawn up by a body of experts, were turned into prime political issues, involving the prestige and power of the central leaders. *Every* difference of policy threatened the unity of the State apparatus, throwing the progress of economic planning out of gear, involving the fate of vast sections of the people, and the foreign policy of the whole Soviet Union.

Every important decision that was taken became a question of power and involved the victory or defeat of various factions within the Party. Each victory of the existing central apparatus was naturally followed by further restrictions upon the real democracy of the Party, in order to prevent dangerous opposition in the future. Defeated leaders were expelled and the basis of Party leadership became narrower; until in the end democracy disappeared also in the central organs of the Party.

In these circumstances, democratic forms if they existed or were brought into existence, could only remain forms. So the original structure of Soviets rapidly became no more than an appearance, and was in fact dominated by local Party organs that had themselves lost their democratic rights and were merely carrying out orders received from the central State authority.

The maintenance of this fiction of inner-Party democracy is chiefly

responsible for the demagogic and plebiscitary character of the Communist dictatorship, which we have described. As long as the Communist leaders maintain this fiction they must submit all decisions to the vote of the membership. But they cannot risk this vote ever going against them. For this would not merely damage their position as the leadership of the Party, but it would menace their authority as the central State power, the unity of the State and the continuity of their planning.

Thus, in order to secure "democratic consent" for all their decisions they must put them in such a way that the result is a foregone conclusion. Therefore they falsify and distort each question in dispute—often a purely factual problem or a very minor political issue—into something that looks like a struggle for or against the enemies of the State and the Revolution. *Any disagreement thus becomes treachery* and any doubt about the infallibility of the supreme leadership becomes heresy.

However, this mechanism does not prevent serious differences of opinion from *arising*, time and again. It merely *hides* them and makes them appear as something quite different from what they really are. It transforms all political and factual issues into *moral* issues of loyalty versus treachery.

The consequence of this is not only the "negative political education" which we discussed in a previous chapter. Another consequence is the inevitable fate of all opposition groups or individuals however pure and unselfish their motives may have been. Since all Communists who, for one reason or another, found themselves in opposition to the central State authority became automatically "traitors" they were dealt with as such. What is more, *they could be exterminated with the support of the mass of the Russian people who turn as naturally against traitors as any other people and who are not in the position to judge the actual issues involved and to distinguish between traitors and "traitors"*.

The loss of many devoted and able leading revolutionaries and Soviet citizens has been very tragic for the development of the Soviet Union. It was a very heavy price to pay for the fiction of *unanimity* which throughout has been maintained simultaneously with the fiction of democracy.

A third fiction, of equal importance, was that of *continuity*, chiefly maintained through the uninterrupted rule of Stalin as the head of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union ever since Lenin's death.

As far as its *political function* is concerned this continuity of the Communist Party was in fact broken when it became the ruling power of the State, as we have seen. But in the course of its development the Communist Party was completely transformed not only in its political function, but also in its *personnel*.

According to official Soviet statistics of 1939 the membership of the Russian Communist Party was then composed as follows:

Members who entered the Communist Party in or <i>before</i> 1917:	0.3%
Members who entered the Communist Party <i>between</i> 1917 and 1919:	5.3%
Members who entered the Communist Party <i>between</i> 1919 and 1929	24.4%
Members who entered the Communist Party <i>after</i> 1929:	70.0%

In other words: More than ninety per cent of the membership consists of men and women who were not members during the years of the Revolution. Most of them entered the Party only after the period of the Five Year Plans had begun, the majority probably only during the last few years. The old membership has perished, some from natural causes, others in the course of the purges and mass trials.

The present membership of the Communist Party of Russia thus represents an entirely new generation. It is no longer the Party of the old revolutionary fighters. They have served their cause. But what Russia needed after the victorious end of the Civil War was not revolutionaries, but constructors.

A new generation of Soviet citizens has grown up. A new Russian society has emerged. With very few exceptions, the real leaders of this new society did not come from the ranks of the original Communist Party. The new technocracy and intelligentsia grew up outside the Party. In the end the technicians became contemptuous of the Party. It became common for Stakhanovites to laugh at the Party Cells.

Yet, until very recently, people who had risen from the ranks of the ordinary workers to leading positions as experts or managers because of their superior intelligence, skill or industry had been barred from the Communist Party which from its beginning had regarded anyone who was not an ordinary worker as a potential "class enemy".

At the Eighteenth Party Congress held in March, 1939, the Communist Party Statutes were revised to meet this anomalous situation. On the basis of this revision the social prestige of the intelligentsia, technicians and factory managers has ceased to be impaired by political disadvantages. Politically, too, their leadership has been recognised by the new facilities given to them for entering the Party on equal terms.

The new Communist Party is increasingly becoming an organisation of technicians and the workers' aristocracy. It may be free from future wholesale purges which have already succeeded in removing all elements from the Party by which the existing rulers might have felt themselves endangered. The indiscriminate removal of Party members by arrests and denunciation was sharply condemned at the Eighteenth Party Congress.

Thus a new Party is being built which is quite different from the old, in its functions, its social structure, and its position in the State.

Socially the new Party will increasingly be drawn from the aristocracy of privileged workers, technicians and upper bureaucrats and thereby lose all similarity to its former character as the party of the underdog. It will represent the leading strata of the new generation of the new Russia—a generation that has been produced by the period of plan-economy and is quite different from the generation of old Bolsheviks which it has supplanted, partly by force, but nevertheless as the natural and necessary adaptation of the Party to a newly born society. In short, the present Communist Party is the Party of that section of the new generation which occupies the privileged and responsible positions in public life.

It is a Party which is not only different from the old Bolshevik Party but also represents very little of its tradition; a Party of people who grew up under the conditions of Russia's isolation—conditions which have therefore *unfitted them for international leadership of the working-class movement*. On the other hand, they are creating great new traditions of their own, traditions of conscious sacrifice and patriotism and of a stubborn perseverance against the most tremendous odds a country has ever undertaken to master. It is this new tradition on which the Soviet Union can rely in her present life and death struggle.

12

RELATIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

RUSSIA'S EXTERNAL POLICY from the beginning has been unique in having two separate instruments—the policy of the Comintern with its collection of satellite national Communist Parties, and the foreign policy proper of the State. Except for a short period under Lenin's ascendancy, corresponding to the period when Russia's future was considered to be bound up with the development of the world revolution, these two instruments have been distinct and have often expressed conflicting tendencies. *

In the external policy of the Soviet Union the conflict of which we have spoken in the preceding chapter became clearly visible, the conflict of Russia in her role as a proletarian and revolutionary vanguard aspiring to the leadership of the working-class of the world and her role as a national Russian State concerned with her own economic reconstruction, her own strategic and diplomatic security and prestige.

Just as Russian democracy became an appearance alongside the real power of the State apparatus so, in foreign affairs, the role of the revolutionary proletarian vanguard has been increasingly subordinated to the realistic needs of a World Power. It would be utterly idealistic to blame the Soviet Union for this "national" rather than international

orientation, which, after all, corresponded only to the objective situation of her isolation. It is not *her* fault that her revolution remained isolated. If it is anyone's responsibility it is that of the international labour movement which failed to secure a workers' victory in any other country.

Unfortunately, however, the Communist leadership did not draw the necessary and logical conclusions from this situation. As in its internal policy, so in its external policy it retained organisations although they could not fulfil their function and were mere forms that had been stripped of all their contents.

(a) *The Communist International*

In Chapter 4 we showed that the Communist International owes its origin to the theory (which Lenin conceived during the first World War) that the world was ripe for revolution and that nothing was needed for carrying through this revolution but to replace the old rotten Labour and Social Democratic Parties and their false and treacherous leaders by genuinely revolutionary organisations.

When by 1924-25 the Bolsheviks were faced with the realisation that their revolution had remained isolated, they drew—in their internal policy—one of the possible realistic conclusions by attempting the task of building “Socialism in one country”. They did not, however, take the step of abandoning or dissolving the Communist International although it must have become perfectly clear to them that, under the circumstances, the Comintern could not fulfil the function for which it had been originally designed.

Gradually, but quite inevitably therefore, the Third International was degraded to the role of a mere agent of Soviet foreign policy. The most tragic aspect of this development has been that it took place *unnoticed* by the mass of the rank and file membership of the Communist Parties themselves. This has been due chiefly to the fact that, in their organisational structure, the individual Communist Parties were exactly modelled on the pattern of the Russian Communist Party. In all Communist Parties all decisions are made exclusively by the few leading members of the Central Committee who, in turn, are merely carrying out the orders received from their Russian headquarters. But, *as in the Soviet Union, this dictatorship is hidden under the cloak of a sham inner-Party democracy.* The same mechanism applies throughout. Not only in the Soviet Union, but also in the various national Communist Parties the leadership secures the necessary “democratic consent” of the rank and file membership by putting all issues before them in such a way that the result is a foregone conclusion, that is to say, by *distorting and falsifying issues so that they look like moral issues, in which the members have only the choice of siding with the cause of revolution or the cause of counter-revolution, in which they can either*

stick to the "straight line" or "deviate", in which they can be either "loyal" or "traitors", either "Marxists-Leninists-Stalinists" or heretics.

As in Russia, too, these "traitors" and "heretics" are expelled from the Party and "exterminated", politically if not physically. The worst enemy of the Communist, in his own eyes, is thus not the reactionary bourgeois, but the disloyal and heretic Communist. In this way the fiction of inner-Party democracy is maintained side by side with the fiction of unanimity—exactly as in Russia. And the smooth functioning of this mechanism prevents many of the ordinary rank and file membership from ever discovering it.

We have called all this the most tragic aspect of the development of the Comintern because it is chiefly responsible for the fact that many valuable people have been lost to the main force of the international Labour Movement. This is not so much the case in Britain as it is, or has been, in many countries of the Continent.

It is extremely doubtful, for instance, whether Hitler could ever have come to power in Germany if it had not been for that unhappy split in the German Labour Movement which divided the working class into two violently hostile camps—one Social Democratic, the other Communist. It is true that many of the best and bravest anti-Fascist Germans were to be found among the Communists. But owing to the absolute dependence of their Party on Russia's policy and its corresponding zig-zag course which had no relationship whatever to the development of Germany, the Communists had no chance of consolidating their—at one time—considerable influence on the German workers. Although not at all enthusiastic about the weak and compromising policy of the Social Democratic Party, the bulk of the workers of Germany (as of every other industrial country) chose to remain loyal to it rather than leave it and join the Communists.

In spite of their attempts from time to time to achieve collaboration the Communist Parties thus tended to be isolated from the main bodies of workers in every land. They themselves tried to attribute this, time and again, to "mistakes". But consistent failure over a quarter of a century argues a more fundamental weakness.

The history of the Comintern and its member parties is a very complex story of Russia's attempts to play off various capitalist powers against each other, to stimulate certain nationalist colonial movements, and always to present the whole as being in the interest of world revolution. Russia's foreign policy has been more subtle and secretive than that of any other country from this necessity to give it always a revolutionary and doctrinaire justification. The story is rendered more complex by its interaction with domestic politics. Changes of line in the political struggle at home have been reflected in Comintern policies; and Comintern policies have frequently become pawns in the internal political struggles.

The various national Communist Parties have thus had to act not only in the interests of Russian foreign policy, but also in the interests of some clique struggling for power over its rivals inside Russia. Where Russia's national interest has been involved there has been no hesitation in making the Comintern and its member-parties bow and bend to the interests of the Soviet Union or even, where necessary, in sacrificing the national Communist Parties altogether. Two striking examples of this point are (a) the adoption of the Popular Front policy by the Comintern when Russia wished to make the Franco-Soviet Pact, and then its sudden abandonment at the moment of the Moscow-Berlin Pact; and (b) the sacrifice of the Chinese Communist Party to Chiang Kai Shek in 1926.

The fatal consequences of Russia's control over the Communist Parties of the world have never been more clearly demonstrated than in the somersaults of the Communists from advocates of a militant anti-Hitlerism to defeatists who were prepared to give their backing to Hitler's diplomatic moves, and then back again, after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union.

The Comintern has miserably failed in all its tasks. Under the circumstances it could not but miserably fail. There are a number of indications that the leaders of the Soviet Union have at last accepted this fact. The two most important of these indications are (a) their readiness to negotiate with the British Trade Unions without making unacceptable conditions; and (b) even more significant—the amazing and absolute silence to which the leaders of the Soviet Union have condemned the Comintern (including even Dimitrov, its nominal leader, and hero of the Reichstag fire trial) ever since Hitler's assault on their country.

(b) Soviet Foreign Policy

Soviet foreign policy has been torn between the need to preserve the national interests and prestige of Russia, and the desire to enjoy the fruits of being the revolutionary leader of the workers in every country. At first this was a real dilemma; incidentally one of the dilemmas which produced the fierce political struggle between Stalin and Trotsky. Increasingly, as Russia turned more and more to her own internal development in isolation, the demands of national interest and prestige have triumphed over the demands of international leadership of the workers. The attempts to deck out Russian foreign policy in terms of revolutionary tactics has, however, never been abandoned, and it has obvious uses for Russia. In fact, however, the attempt to identify Russian foreign policy with world revolution has depended not upon the proof of deeds, but upon the mere article of faith that the Soviet Union and socialism are identical terms; that what the Soviet Union does must, by definition and without further need of proof, be in the interests of world socialism.

Russia's actual foreign policy has been in the main the fruit of a realistic acceptance of her position in the world. Once Russia decided to go on and modernise herself in isolation, she needed one thing more than anything else—peace. To preserve peace with the outside world was the chief motive of her foreign policy; above all she had to avoid the danger of uniting the world against her. This involved alliances and friendship with certain groups of capitalist States against others.

Originally her policy was to ally with Germany against the Versailles Powers and to back the nationalist movement in China in order further to weaken them. Right down to 1933 France and Britain were regarded as the real enemies of the Soviet Union.

This situation was changed by Hitler's rise to power in 1933. It was Hitler who switched German-Soviet relations from friendship to hostility. Not only was he convinced that war against the Soviet Union would eventually be the supreme task of his foreign policy; but he also wished to win the benevolent support of France and Britain during the "danger zone" period of his rearmament. When he further made an alliance with Japan, Russia was faced by the threat of war on two fronts with France and Britain as hostile neutrals.

Russia's riposte was to embark on the Popular Front policy (1935), soft-peddalling revolutionary talk and advocating, through the mouths of Litvinov and the various Communist Parties, a liberal League-of-Nations-policy designed to concentrate Left-wing and progressive opinion in Britain, and particularly in France against the appeasement tendencies in their countries.

This policy lasted until the fateful autumn days of 1938 when, during the "Munich Crisis", appeasement seemed finally to have gained the upper hand in Britain and France. When Chamberlain and Daladier sat down at the same table with Hitler and Mussolini to sign the death-warrant of Czechoslovakia, the Russians became convinced that their "League of Nations policy" had definitely failed.

True, Hitler became an increasing menace to Britain and France, too; but all the greater, in Russian eyes, was the danger that the Western Powers would try and divert Germany's aggressive aims against the Soviet Union.

That, however, was the time, when the people of Britain and France began at last seriously to face the fact that they would have to fight Hitler if they did not want to perish. And on the basis of this realisation, advances to Russia were made in the eleventh hour for an alliance or at least co-operation. These advances came too late. By that time Russia had finally decided that the Western Powers could not be trusted—an idea deeply rooted in the minds of the Soviet leaders ever since the war of intervention against the Revolution.

Germany, on the other hand, wanted under all circumstances to

avoid a two-front war,¹ as the Russians well knew. In this situation the Soviet leaders thought it expedient to promise Hitler sufficient support to make it worth his while risking a war against his imperialist enemies in the West. Moreover, Germany could pay a higher price than the Allies, offering to Russia the attainment of her various strategic aims at the expense of her small neighbours.

As a consequence, in August 1939 the German-Russian Pact was concluded as a prelude to the Second World War.

We doubt whether Stalin had any more illusions about the value of this Pact than Hitler had. That is best proved by the Russian invasions of Poland, Finland, and Bessarabia which—tragic and indefensible though they were when judged by any moral standards, particularly in view of the hypocritical propaganda that accompanied these acts of aggression—were clearly and unambiguously *measures of strategic protection against a threatening German attack*. They were nothing more, certainly nothing in the nature of a “red imperialism”, as many people suggested.

Strange as it may sound, Hitler's assault on the Soviet Union, on June 22nd, 1941, despite all its frightfulness, has given the world, including the Soviet Union herself, a new chance. A new chance of defeating Hitler and, after that, a new chance of organising a progressive peace based on the permanent reconciliation and a firm and durable alliance between the Western Democracies and a Soviet Russia which can at last overcome her isolation and all the unhappy consequences which have resulted from it.

¹ To make this often misunderstood and frequently misused term quite clear: to Germans a “two front war” is not an abstract notion of two different fronts anywhere in the world, but has always meant *one* thing only—a simultaneous land war against Russia on Germany's Eastern frontier and Britain and France on her Western frontier.

PART IV

CONCLUSIONS

13

SOVIET RUSSIA—LEADER OR ALLY?

WE HAVE COME to the end of the first task we set ourselves in this book, which was to trace out the causes of the actual development of the Soviet Union and her policy. While doing so we endeavoured throughout neither to accuse nor to justify. Our task has been solely to *understand*.

Our interest in the Soviet Union, however, is not that of an aloof observer or an academic historian. Our interest is of a much more *practical* nature; for the task of Socialism which the Soviet Union has been trying to solve is *our* task. From the point of view of this *common* task, and in its name it is more than our right, it is our duty to form a judgment of this development and to draw from it the necessary conclusions.

Neither our deep admiration for the heroic defenders of the Soviet Union, nor our fraternal feelings of solidarity with them in the common cause of our struggle against Hitlerite Germany, nor even our deep and sincere desire to mould the present community in arms into something so firm and permanent that it will outlast the war and be the basis for real peace in the world—none of these must make us accept blindly and religiously everything that has happened in Soviet Russia as right and good.

We fully realise how easy it is to be wise after the event. Alternative courses which might have led to better results often become visible only subsequently as such. As we have seen, the circumstances in which the Russians tried to achieve their gigantic tasks were, in most respects, particularly unfavourable. Nor must we forget that they were the *pioneers* who had to experiment without any practical experience or lesson on which to build.

However, *because a particular development has its causes it does not follow that it has been inevitable.*

There can be no doubt that—all objective difficulties apart—serious and often tragic mistakes have been made and that the wrong turnings have been taken at many critical junctures. The most serious error, in our view, has been the consistent attempt to combine a concealed dictatorship with a sham democracy inside the Communist Party, in the country at large and in the Comintern. If the Communist leaders of Russia were right in the assumption that a genuine democracy was in fact incompatible with the task they had set themselves—the maximum rapidity of industrialisation—then they would have done far better by abolishing all sham democratic institutions and restricting the membership of the Communist Party to a small *élite* of people who could really take responsibility. That would not only have been more “honest”, but it would have given the Soviet Union a much better chance for a subsequent gradual development towards a real democracy. A small select Party whose members are not allowed (or forced) to appeal to the broad public for support of their views is in no need of distorting these views and issues for the sake of popularity. Moreover, if this appeal to the public is avoided, controversies and disputes about political and factual issues do not degenerate into struggles for power in the State, and do not therefore assume that sinister character that all conflicts of opinion tend to have in the Soviet Union. Within a small select Party such issues can be objectively discussed and decided, and at least, in that circle, a genuine freedom of discussion and criticism could be maintained. Such a Party, because it would not permanently feel itself threatened in its power, could, above all, fulfil the essential function of politically educating an ever growing circle of people and on the basis of this education gradually introduce genuine democracy. A start with training in democratic methods could have been made in the U.S.S.R. both through local and limited organs of self-government and through mass organisations such as Trade Unions. Democratic government at the centre would then have developed as the end of a long process, during which the people would have been educated to make effective use of it.

The Russians have, in fact, several times tried to introduce some measures of real democracy, particularly during the period before the murder of Kirov. The fact that all these attempts were doomed to failure was due above all to the fictitious democracy with which they had cloaked their dictatorship.

It would be futile to trace and enumerate individually the mistakes made by the Soviet leadership. We are concerned with the past only in so far as it teaches us something for the present and the future—the future of the British Labour Movement, the future of the Soviet Union and the future of international Socialism.

How then have we to regard the Soviet Union? As a warning or as a model to be followed by Western Socialism? Or as a State like

any other State with which we happen to be in alliance in this war?

Neither of these questions can be answered by a plain YES or NO. The Soviet Union is a *Socialist State* in that there is no private profit made from the process of production and no private groups or individuals able to undertake production in their own interest. It was the first State with a planned economy and is the only State with a fully planned economy. The Soviet Union has therefore established for its citizens economic security and is certainly *the most economically progressive country in the world*.

Politically the Soviet Union is a totalitarian State, ruled by a single Party system without freedom of Press or opinion on major questions and without freedom of association for any purpose. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is the organ of the Government, with the result that even opposition within the Party is opposition to the Dictatorship and therefore suppressed.

This is not to say that different opinions are not represented within the Party or that there is no competition for power between different interests, e.g. between the technicians and the political bosses, or between the advocates of alliance with the democracies and the advocates of the Nazi Pact. But in these struggles the masses play no part and they are decided on the basis of external events by the small group in whom the power ultimately rests.

However much we may dislike this form of Government and believe that far greater progress and individual happiness would be possible if the pressure of the State were relaxed and freedom of criticism and association permitted, we must realise that the Russian masses have known no greater freedom and are vastly better off than they were before the Revolution. The Régime is therefore stable and there does not appear to be any social basis for serious opposition. Even the hopes of Hitler for peasant uprisings and national minority movements have proved to be absolutely without foundation. On the contrary, the magnificent way in which the Soviet people withstand the ordeal of the Nazi onslaught together with the successful revival of the methods of revolutionary warfare (scorched earth policy and guerrilla fighting) show that the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union fully realise how much they have to lose.

The present alliance between the Soviet Union and the Western Democracies is the result neither of the policy of the Western Powers, nor of that of the Western Labour Movements, nor of that of the Soviet Régime. This alliance has been forced on us by the advance of German Fascism. Nor has Soviet Russia's entry into the war on our side fundamentally changed the character of the war as a whole, as the Communists maintain. The supreme task of defeating Hitlerism has remained exactly what it was.

What has changed are: (a) the prospects of winning the war, which have been greatly increased; (b) the prospects of securing a progressive peace after the war, which have been equally increased; and (c) last, but not least, the prospect of finally overcoming the isolation of the Soviet Union with all the significant consequences that that must have for her as well as our own development.

The significance of all three points is obviously tremendous. *Their realisation depends as much on the mutual sincerity of the will for close and permanent co-operation as on mutual independence.* Neither must we allow our alliance with the Soviet Union to be abused by vested interests in an attempt to get an economic foothold in Russia after the war, nor can the Western Labour Movement ever subordinate its own interests or the interests of international Socialism to those of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union is for us an *ally* in the fullest sense of the word and we must do everything in our power to achieve a lasting co-operation between her people and ourselves. The Soviet Union cannot be regarded in any way as a leader to be followed or a model to be imitated by Western Socialism.

It is essential to make this point crystal-clear, because Russia's past self-identification with the cause of world Socialism has done serious harm to the international movement. It has led to a tortuous and jesuitical propaganda that has confused the issues before the workers. It has brought Communist Parties into existence who, at best, have diverted and dissipated the workers' energies and, at worst, have helped to bring disaster upon the whole movement, as in Germany.

It is impossible to foretell exactly how the war will end. It is unlikely, however, that the Western Powers will ever have on the Continent an army comparable in size to the Red Army or the German Wehrmacht. Britain and America will certainly have powerful mechanised forces at several points: in North Africa, in Italy, in Norway or on the other side of the Channel. If Hitler fails to destroy the Red Army—and it looks very much as though he will: while we are writing these lines he is suffering his first major defeat on the Eastern Front—the Red Army will be left as the most powerful land force in the world, but it will be a force largely dependent for supplies on Britain and America. The strain of modern war on the Russian economy will be immense, while the destruction wrought in the battle areas both by the enemy and the Russians themselves in carrying out their "scorched earth" policy will greatly weaken the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, when the war ends, the military powers of Britain and America will have reached their highest points. Herein lie both the opportunity and the danger.

The danger is that British and American monopoly capitalism will attempt to use its economic power to establish its own domination of Europe and will take advantage of Russian economic exhaustion

to compel her to accept this. Such an acceptance could never be sincere on the part of the Soviet Union. It would, in fact, newly strengthen her isolationist tendencies and kill all chances of genuine co-operation and consequently of an eventual real democratisation of the U.S.S.R.

The capitalists, on the other hand, would see in it the opportunity to gain permanent influence in Russian economy, while strengthening their own reactionary control at home.

The prospect of such a development might well turn into a reality the fear which is present in the minds of some capitalist, and even some labour circles: namely, an attempt by the Russian leaders to bring large parts of Europe under their political control. This fear has been greatly exaggerated, and we are convinced that the Russian leaders would not try to tackle the almost insuperable political and economic obstacles to such an attempt unless they were driven to it as the only way of countering the menace of Anglo-American monopoly capitalism.

Whether such an attempt were made or not such a situation must eventually lead to a violent conflict between the two systems; for the Russians, in true Bolshevik tradition, would break their links with the West at the moment when they felt sufficiently strong to do so and would take advantage of all the discontent that such a system must entail. The Communist Parties would once again be used to split the Labour Movements in the democratic capitalist countries, so that the influence of these movements would be finally lost. The resultant war would be one in which democratic ideas played no part at all. It would be a war between monopoly capitalism rapidly becoming dictatorship, and the single party dictatorship of the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, if the Western Democracies can finally realise that the Soviet State has come to stay, the present alliance provides the opportunity for an agreement on which permanent security in Europe could be based. In the reconstruction of Europe the rights and duties of all the three major allied powers must be equal. The essential factor for Soviet acceptance of such an agreement is the firm conviction that she is no longer surrounded by enemies, but can rely on the friendship of the Western Democracies.

This conviction can only come from the assurances of the friendly forces in the democratic countries provided that the Soviet leaders can be made to believe that those forces have the power to implement them. No amount of friendly visits, delegations, resolutions and collections will cut any ice with the Soviet leaders if they do not believe that they represent the opinions of a real power in the country from which they emanate.

Such a condition could only be fulfilled by the determination of the Democratic Socialist movements of the West to ensure the Socialist reconstruction of Europe in alliance with the Soviet Union and to achieve sufficient power for that purpose.

Determination alone is however not even enough. We must also know

what we mean when we talk of "socialist reconstruction". Nor is it sufficient to state in general terms that we are fighting for a democratic rather than a totalitarian planned economy. It still remains to be seen whether the conception of a democratic planned society is not a Utopian dream.

It is to answer *this* question rather than for any other reasons that we have examined the causes of the actual Soviet development which produced planning, but not democracy.

What can and what must the Western Labour Movement deduce from the Russian development for its own Socialist task?

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THE FUNDAMENTALS OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

AS FAR AS we can judge from the Russian experience we can say that: (a) some degree of centralised control and of delegation of administrative responsibility to a specialised stratum of technicians, experts and managers is inevitable in any planned society. In other words, the ideal of a classless society in which, on principle, all functions are interchangeable, must be regarded as Utopian. A planned society cannot do without a bureaucracy; (b) a planned society and the existence of a bureaucracy do not, in themselves, lead to a dictatorship. The totalitarian and anti-democratic aspects of the Russian system are not an essential part of planned socialism.

These totalitarian aspects can be demonstrated to be the results of special historical conditions aggravated by the particular internal Party fights that have occurred in Russia. These fights have themselves resulted from the isolation of the U.S.S.R. in a period of political reaction in Europe, from the smallness of the original Russian proletariat, from the slow education and proletarianisation of a backward peasantry, from the attempts to create a stratum of experts and technicians from this material, and from the need to impose sustained sacrifices in order to achieve a rapid industrialisation. As we have seen, all these factors have resulted in the evolution of a particular kind of dictatorial régime in Russia that is not representative of Socialism but of Russia's attempt to socialise herself in especially difficult circumstances. We can therefore say that a bureaucracy with directive powers is no more than an *instrument* of modern society and that it is in principle compatible with either a democratic or a dictatorial régime.

More generally speaking, a planned society becomes dictatorial not because of the planning but if and when the general conditions are lacking for the functioning of a democracy; that is to say, if and

when this society finds itself in such difficulties that it can no longer reconcile the various conflicting interests and arrive at a workable compromise. Under such conditions, however, every State becomes dictatorial, with or without a planned economy. In the Soviet Union, the Party dictatorship was established not as a result of a planned economy, but long before. In Germany, too, economic planning was not started until the Nazi dictatorship had firmly established itself.

However, the purely negative statement that a planned society does not necessarily involve a dictatorial régime is not enough. We must also show how full economic planning can actually function under the conditions of political democracy.

The bourgeois democrats based their hopes on the assumption that the greatest possible freedom for the individual (in the negative sense of freedom from state interference) would automatically and by Providence lead to the greatest common good. The aim was to clear away feudal survivals and to guard against the real danger of ignorant State tyranny. But the result was concentration upon *formal* political freedom and freedom of contract, i.e. formal legal equality in economic relationships for all individuals. Bourgeois democracy has great actual and potential achievements to its credit; but it means essentially the equal right of rich and poor to sleep under bridges or to dine at the Ritz.

In other words, bourgeois democracy enormously and beneficially increased the field of *visible liberty*; it created legal and political freedoms and restricted the sphere of open and arbitrary interference with the individual's freedom of action. But, at the same time, it involved the development of a great mass of *invisible compulsions*; the powers of individuals to coerce and control their fellows by the hidden means of economic pressure, power of the press and of propaganda and the like. Moreover, these invisible compulsions were under no sort of public control. They were exercised by individuals in their own interest; and, so far from being understood, their very existence was denied by the defenders of bourgeois democracy who claimed that its formal liberty was total and complete liberty, indeed, the only possible form of liberty.

Under democratic Socialism a life of free and equal choice must be more than the sum of mere freedom from arbitrary State tyranny plus the universal franchise. One of our tasks is to re-define and extend the concept of liberty. Bourgeois democracy (which only managed to extend full liberty to a relatively small section of society) always assumed liberty to be an automatically desirable and easy good which all people must naturally desire and could enjoy without difficulty. This has never been so. Liberty involves responsibility—the readiness to consider the interests of others—the need to make decisions that will have consequences for which one is answerable. Full democratic

liberty, besides consisting of certain guaranteed rights and freedoms, is a thing that can only be created and made possible by *social action*.

We must therefore know what we are doing when we say that the purpose of socialist democracy is to maximise the liberties and responsibilities of the individual. Good laws and constitutions (important as they are) will not be enough. Full democracy and full liberty demand a code of social and political behaviour (either inherited through the historical experiences of the society or induced by practice and education) that can make democracy work. In Britain we have the advantage of very widespread self-government and a large organised working-class.

The increase and maintenance of full democracy in the State of the future will demand very special capacities in the individual—for the strains and stresses of modern society are particularly great and the central power of the State will impinge in many new ways upon the life of the individual.

Liberty in the democratic socialist society of the future will be dependent upon social actions. But these actions will necessarily involve the greatly increased power of the State. Is that not a contradiction in terms? A powerful State and individual liberty were by the bourgeois democrats assumed to be in absolute conflict. The experiences of the Soviet Union as well as of the Fascist States seem to support this assumption.

Yet, this assumption is correct only if liberty is defined as freedom from State interference. In the light of the experiences of modern society, however, this definition has become meaningless. If we do not want to be left behind by history we must arrive at a new conception of liberty—a conception which recognises that *an increase in total individual liberty is not only compatible with, but dependent on, an increase in the compulsory powers of the State*.

This has, in fact, already been accepted in a limited degree during the last hundred years, and it is typified by such legislation as the Factory Acts (which prohibit anti-social action), compulsory education (which compels action for the good of the individual and of society), and the redistribution of income by income tax and social services. These latter are excellent examples of the increase of the freedom of the individual by the removal of the "invisible compulsions" inherent in illiteracy and extreme economic inequality.

The growth of totalitarian systems has recently caused a certain reaction due to fear of the ever-growing power of the State in every country. The fact is that *the alternative to the growth of visible powers is the expansion of the invisible powers exercised by the great financial and industrial groups which dominate our economic and social life*.

To-day every man may be left free to exercise his vote. But his real choice of life, his very choice of ideas is more and more determined for him by those who wield the economic power. Their very control of

propaganda may even deceive the masses into believing that their lives are free and of their own making.

We shall succeed in building a democratic socialist society only if we see to it that all necessary compulsions are as open and visible as possible and are freely accepted by the majority of the people. In other words, *the limits of human freedom possible in an organised society must be equal for all and fully understood by all*. That this is not a Utopian aim has been amply proved not only by the experiences quoted above (compulsory education, taxation, etc.). It is being particularly vividly demonstrated in these days when such things as military and industrial conscription, rationing, increased taxation—not to mention the black-out—have been freely accepted by the mass of the people who give their genuine “democratic consent” to these measures because they understand their necessity.

Under Socialism the main growth of Government action will be in the economic sphere. The State will have to take compulsory powers to plan the economic life of the nation. Economic liberty with its consequent economic anarchy and invisible compulsion of the majority of individuals by a minority will have to go, once and for all; in its place will be a visible and positive power exercised by the State. This will be the first characteristic of the democratic Socialist State.

Though there can be no economic liberty for the individual in the old sense of the power to do what he likes with his own “property”—even when this property consists in the social means of production—there will, of course, be innumerable opportunities for the exercise by the individual of economic responsibility both in the creation and the execution of the central plan.

Efficiency will demand great flexibility and this will depend on the capacity of individuals. Moreover, there will be many non-economic spheres of life in which the individual must be guaranteed and must create for himself the chances of full liberty. It is absolutely essential that both the private possessions (as opposed to ownership of the means of production) and the rights of the individual should be protected by complete legal safeguards and by a strong and independent judiciary. In many respects the mechanisms worked out by British law (such as Habeas Corpus) can serve as models here—models that can be made into realities by the removal of gross economic inequalities and by the control of invisible compulsion.

The greatly increased power of the State will, however, remain as a fact in the new society. What then are the features that will ensure that this increase in State power will in reality enlarge the sphere of individual liberty and differentiate Democratic Socialism from Totalitarianism? What possibilities are there for genuine democratic control?

The essential feature here will be the *freedom of organisation*. The

rights and functions of organisations will, in the modern democratic State, be one of the chief ways in which the individual can effectively share in public life and in the control of the power of the State.

Interest-groups there will be in a socialist as in a capitalist society. Every democracy demands the possibility of harmonising these interests by compromises. But under capitalism these compromises are regularly in favour of the ruling class because of the original strength of its position as a negotiating partner. In a socialist society the overriding power must be vested in the State, which must itself take over the powers of some of the groups we know (such as the monopoly trusts).

One of the marks of totalitarian society is the destruction of the independence of organised groups. *Freedom of organisation is, in fact, the best means of democratic self-expression and one of the essential safeguards for the individual against bureaucratic tyranny.*

Organisations exist also in Totalitarian States; they are indeed one of their main organs of power. But their function is to transmit the will of the central executive and to spy on and terrorise the people. In a democratic State, on the other hand, organisations will partly help to create and partly to modify or even challenge the will of the executive.

This the organisations will be able to do because, by collective effort, they will be able to acquire specialised knowledge, publicity and power which are beyond the reach of the single atomised individual in modern mass society. The organisations can and must be of many types—political, industrial, cultural, and so on. First among them will be political parties, trade unions, and professional associations.

The success or failure of our society will depend on the relation of these organisations to the State and the degree of compatibility and compromise they can achieve between themselves. The rights and functions of organisations within the State and vis-à-vis the Government may be laid down in a legal code, but the stability of the society will not depend on laws and legal codes, but on actual practice and behaviour. There is no substitute, in a democratic society, that can take the place of *a general compatibility of aim and purpose and a generally accepted code of social behaviour*, but this can only be perfected by the creation of a living tradition through experience and education. This code includes both the conduct of the individual within industry and society generally and the practice of government by committees and by combinations of elected persons and public officials; social techniques which have in Western Europe taken centuries to develop. One of the problems of the extension of democracy will be to achieve the mastery of these techniques in less developed societies.

In our present society all organisations are subject to legal restrictions governing their actions, and these restrictions will certainly have to be adjusted in a planned society to fit in with the general plan. In the last resort the State must have the power to prevent the growth of

organisations whose object is the overthrow of the democratic State and the destruction of the principles on which it is founded. Especially in the transition period from a Capitalist to a Socialist society must this central power reside in the hands of the Executive. Outside these restrictions it must be the right of organisations to fight for public opinion in any matter of public concern and the right of the political parties to organise this public opinion and to represent it in a Parliament elected by the free vote of the whole people. These features of our present democracy must remain.

The question remains whether all these rights and liberties of organisations must not—as in Russia—deteriorate to mere sham rights and sham liberties in view of the overriding power of the central State authority and its bureaucracy.

It is true that planning involves the enforcement of the central plan against all sorts of different individual and group interests and consequently also against the organisations which represent these group interests in Parliament or otherwise. But so does every Act of Parliament and every law that forces individuals and minorities to submit to the will of the majority. The difference between dictatorship and democracy, as we have seen, is not the difference between coercion and absence of coercion. *The difference lies in the method by which important decisions are made and carried out.* The crucial point is whether such important political or economic decisions are dictated by a small group of people that happens to control the State apparatus or whether these decisions are made in a democratic way, that is to say after public debates and discussions, in which all opinions and interests can be freely represented, and by means of voting, parliamentary divisions and similar methods.

There is no reason whatsoever why a central economic plan which would have to overrule all individual and group interests should not itself be the result of a genuine democratic compromise between these conflicting interests.

The State as the representative of the general interests of the population as consumers, will determine the general contents of the Plan with the consequent decisions on the relationship between the production of consumption and capital goods, the amount of money for investment and the amount to be distributed for personal income, priorities for the production of certain goods, the portion of production to be used for exports, and so forth.

As the representatives of particular interests it will be the function of the Trade Unions to conduct the negotiations which must arise for the distribution of the total available income as between one trade or profession and another and between the categories within each trade. This is different from the struggle, under Capitalist conditions, for the maximum share in the proceeds of an industry which is uncontrolled in its activities and profits.

Moreover, to make democracy really effective it will be necessary to control and check the execution of the plan in all its stages. The major decisions in the carrying out of the Plan will have to be made by authorities with expert knowledge and the power of command, in other words, by a bureaucracy. It is essential to prevent this bureaucracy from abusing its powers and to subject it to a genuine democratic control. Particularly in industry will committees of workers have a very important part to play, not only in matters directly affecting the welfare of the workers themselves, but also in initiating new activities and improvements in methods.

This democratic control, however, can become effective only if the working people enjoy economic security, sufficient leisure time and a high level of general education. Without the fulfilment of these three conditions democratic control must remain an empty phrase. If these prerequisites are fulfilled democratic control can become real provided that the workers have the right to create their independent representative bodies, under their own administration which, in all stages—from the individual factory or office up to the Ministries and Central Planning Authorities—have the absolute right of investigation and criticism. This is not only the way to exercise an effective democratic control, it is, moreover, by far the best method of practical education of the masses of workers. It is bound to widen the circle of people from which the bureaucracy is recruited and renewed and to prevent the line which divides the bureaucracy from the rest of the population from becoming a rigid and unsurmountable barrier.

It is impossible to go into greater detail without becoming unreal. Details can only be worked out by practical experience. Our task has been to show that a planned socialist economy is, *in principle*, compatible with political democracy.

As we have seen, it is not only compatible with democracy, it is, under modern conditions, the only way of making democracy really effective. Although the State is bound to increase the sphere of its compulsion within society, the individual, in a planned socialist society, will be enabled to increase his own total liberty by his participation in the activities of democratic institutions of all kinds, and his ability to determine their policy and outlook by the weight of his opinion and his vote, and to hold executive office within them.

In fact, a democratic socialist planned society will actually reduce the total field of compulsion on the individual by balancing the necessary compulsory powers of the State with greatly increased opportunities to participate in the life of free organisations.

We have shown why, under the circumstances in which Russia found herself, such a society could not yet emerge. *We are convinced, on the other hand, that in Britain the major conditions for the functioning of a society of this type are in existence.*

We shall not, however, wake up one morning and find to our satisfaction that this ideal has become reality. It will never become reality unless we make it so. But the danger is not only that things will remain as they are unless we do something about them. The danger is that unless we change them things will become incomparably worse, so bad indeed that our children may wonder why we ever fought this war.

The terrific post-war problems of switching over from war-time to peace-time production, which we shall have to face both in our own country and on the starved and partly devastated European Continent, cannot possibly be solved without a vast and comprehensive scheme of planning under State control. Nor can the problems which the war itself presents, more urgently from month to month, be solved, and the war actually be won, without a much greater degree of State control over production.

The question to be decided is *in whose interest* this control is to be taken and the planning carried out. Nor can this question be left open until after the war. For, although war planning and peace planning are in content two entirely different things, a large part of the machine that must be created for war planning can effectively be used for post-war reconstruction as well. The question of control—which is fundamentally a question of political power—is therefore one of the most urgent tasks facing the Labour Movement to-day.

The process of establishing a planned society and carrying through the social changes that are involved in the concept of democratic socialism will be a lengthy one and is, in fact, that of the Social Revolution. For revolution is not that which distinguishes a violent from a non-violent change but the whole process of fundamental economic and social transformation from which a new society emerges.

The danger of an anti-democratic solution of the inevitable post-war crisis is a very real one unless the forces of democratic socialism in this country have by that time gained full control of the State and have given the State full economic powers. In this task there can be no compromise until the outcome has been finally decided. And on the outcome will not only depend the fate of Britain, perhaps for generations to come. On it will also depend the chance of a constructive and progressive peace, the chance of permanent co-operation with the U.S.S.R., the chance of Socialist reconstruction of Europe, and, last but not least, the chance of the democratisation of the Soviet Union, no longer isolated and unaided.

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